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The SWORD

and the

NET

WARREN STUART

The SWORD and the NET



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1 BERLIN

THERE was a hard, pale sun outside. It shone down through the tracery of the naked lime trees and made their branches black against the chill blue of the sky. It shone through the window of the room they had lent Otto in the new S.S. barracks and glittered cheerfully on the bright surfaces of paint and chromium. It brought with it the music of a band playing at the far side of the grounds—good, swinging martial music which seemed to swell in Otto's head—and in his throat, where that fantastic and unpredictable and most unmilitary lump had been gathering all the morning.

He coughed harshly; then swallowed three times. That

sometimes worked all right. . . .

There was a rapping at the door, and a voice, harsh yet respectful. "Herr Captain. . . . Is the Herr Captain ready?"

Otto swallowed again; then put both hands to his collar. It was clipped already, but he constricted his aching throat yet further with two fingers.

"Almost. What is it?" he called throatily. "This

damn collar!" The added mutter was convincing.

"All officers to the Mess-Hall in five minutes,

Captain! "

Otto swallowed again. He turned away from the dresser and surveyed himself in the long mirror set into the chromium door of a closet. He was satisfied with what he saw, and not without reason.

He saw six feet of lean, erect and resilient body, wideshouldered, narrow-hipped and admirably set off by the new bluish-grey *Luftwaffe* uniform. It was a good fitan admirable fit. Berlin tailors certainly worked well and fast. Particularly, he supposed, in such a case as his-that of a young and distinguished officer who must on short notice attend an investiture ceremony where the Fuehrer himself would pin yet another decoration upon his chest.

He twitched the high-collared tunic up at the back and down in front. He went back to the dresser in two strides. picked up a hairbrush and dabbed once more at the crisp. corn-coloured hair which would insist upon curling. noted with distaste the pallor of his face and the slightly drawn look over the cheek-bones beneath the steel-blue To the prejudiced gaze of these same eyes the pallor and faint gauntness were glaring clues to the childish throat-filling which would so frequently obsess him at any emotional moment.

He gave the harsh, rasping cough again; then repeated the triple swallow. He strode to the door and went through it and down the wide, gleaming staircase. Both entrance hall and messroom were filling now with officers; young officers and middle-aged officers, officers from every branch of all three fighting arms; officers of all shapes, sizes and ranks; officers, to a man, clad in new, smart uniforms and carrying themselves with pride.

There was a swelling, deep-toned rumbling of men's voices in the outer hall, and from the inner Mess-Hall came yet more and louder voices swelling to a diapason.

Otto, seeing no one whom he knew, threaded his way into the Mess-Hall. Here it was really crowded, and the roar of voices was punctuated by the tinkling of glass, the popping of corks and bursts of laughter. Still there seemed no one here whom he knew-but as he pushed his way towards the bar, edging between a noisy group of dark-uniformed S.S. officers and a little knot of navy men, a heavy hand clapped upon his shoulder.

He looked into the broad, beaming, black-browed face of Ulrich Hegger. Hegger, looming enormous in his new Artillery uniform, had an empty champagne glass in his hand; a glass which he now set down upon the tray of a

passing mess-waiter.

"More!" he said to the man. Then, indicating Otto, "And a glass for Captain Falken. Quick!"

"Yes," said the man. "Yes, Herr Major." At the sound of the name he had started, looking at Otto with wide and warm and worshipping eyes.

Hegger now had Otto's hand and was pumping it up and down enthusiastically. He was delighted to see Otto. And Otto, though not really liking the man, could not help but be pleased.

"Falken!" Hegger said. "Falken, you young villain!

How are you?"

"All right." Otto's voice, because of the lump in his throat, still sounded husky in his own ears. "Bit of a cold, but nothing much."

Hegger turned to the man he had been with—another Artilleryman and a couple of middle-aged Infantry Majors. He said:

"Come and meet Otto Falken—before he is too famous to know you!"

The trio crowded about Otto and were introduced one by one.

Each in his own way showed gratification.

"We've heard all about you," said the Artilleryman. "Great work!"

"Proud to meet you, Captain," said the elder Infantry "You certainly gave those Englishmen a black officer. eve! "

The last was a man of monosyllables. "Great!" he

said jerkily. "Magnificent!"

Otto mumbled thanks in reply, as pleasantly as he could manage. He was rescued by the returning waiter and a glass of champagne which stunned the lump and seemed to reduce it. The band was now outside the windows and its vigorous music came loudly over the humming talk.

Otto suddenly realized that he felt happy-ecstatically, wonderfully happy. . . .

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The music swelled in Otto's ears and mingled with the surf-like thunder of the cheers. . . . He sat in the open car with two other officers whom he never would know. . . . Their car led the procession of many similar cars which wound its way through crowd-lined streets towards the Sportspalast. . . .

At intervals in the serried, orderly ranks of cheering spectators were bands. . . . When you drew near a band there was no cheering until you had passed it and were out of its immediate range—then the cheering began

again. . . .

He and the other officers sat stiffly. Taking his cue from the senior—a bearded naval man whose rank badges were those of a junior Admiral—Otto occasionally turned his head to this side or the other and saluted in acknow-

ledgment of the cheers. . . .

The sun glittered palely down. . . . The cars rolled steadily, slowly on. . . . The roaring and the music and the iron voices of the loudspeakers mingled into one prolonged, triumphant pæan. . . Otto's throat constricted agonizingly behind the high stiff collar of the new uniform. . . . He felt a suspicious pricking behind his eyelids and dared not blink them. He kept the eyes fixedly, burningly wide. . . . He despised himself and was ineffably proud and miserably happy. . . .

And then the Sportspalast—and a species of coma which wrapped him about, cutting him off from real contact with the outer world—his own private, transparent, impreg-

nable cloak. . . .

More music . . . more cheering . . . himself in the centre of a rapid line of waiting officers. . . . Then silence—and on the platform before him, the Fuehrer. . . . Then the harsh, volatile voice, addressing—through the officers, through Otto himself—the tensely listening thousands. . . . That awe-inspiring, extraordinary voice

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. . . the wonderful voice . . . the voice of the Liberator, future Ruler of the World. . . .

And then the slow, single-rank procession to the platform—and Otto in his turn upon it. . . . A firm handshake and the pinning upon his left breast of the most coveted honour in the New Germany. . . . A smile such as had not been granted to any of the men before him. . . . And then, after the smile, words of praise and thanks for his ear alone: personal, private words from the Fuehrer to Otto Falken! . . . Then, amazingly, yet another signal honour—a second handshake. . . .

After minutes or hours in which the coma-cloak had seemed opaque, he found himself out of the main hall and in an anteroom. It was filled with men in uniform; the men who, as well as himself, had just been honoured. He stood apart, wrapped in happiness and misty, unformulated thought. He did not want to speak to anyone nor do anything; he was satisfied to be in this moment. . . .

For the second time to-day a heavy hand slapped him

upon the back and a voice boomed in his ear.

"Falken! Still speaking to your old friends? Or are

you waiting to dine with the Fuehrer?"

It was Hegger again. Otto did his best to be polite but it must have been a poor attempt, for soon the man edged away and was caught up by other companions. Otto stayed where he was—and people left him alone. . . .

The press began to thin. In two and fours, and even singly, officers began to leave. Otto, still wrapped in the impalpable dream-sensations, did not notice their going until he realized that the room was already three-fourths empty.

He was startled. He began to think, untidily. He had four weeks' leave and no idea what he was going to do with it. He did not know many people in Berlin. He went so far as to wonder whether Hegger were still around. He turned his head to look for him—and felt a light touch upon his shoulder.

He turned to find himself—all six feet and more of him—looking up into the grey, lined face of a towering

man in S.S. uniform with badges which, although unfamiliar to Otto, seemed certainly to be those of exalted rank.

"Captain Falken?" said this person.

Otto nodded, trying to keep bewilderment from his eyes.

"Follow me, please." The man turned and strode

away.

Otto followed—not towards the entrance which he and his fellows had used, but to another door, in the rear of the room, which was covered by a heavy curtain bearing golden swastikas upon a background of black velvet. . . .

Behind this door was a dark, narrow passageway dimly lit by yellow bulbs. His guide's feet rang echoingly ahead of him—and Otto followed. Under the tonic of this mystery his mind was functioning almost at its normal and

decisive speed.

At the end of the passageway was another door—and they passed through it into a little high-walled court-yard. There was a car there, with a nondescript, hunched-over man behind the wheel. Its engine was running. It was a black limousine, and blinds were down over its windows.

The S.S. officer opened the tonneau door. "Get in,

please," he said.

Otto paused with one foot upon the running board. This was too much. He said:

"Where are we going? And what for?"

The thin-lipped mouth of the escort twisted in what was doubtless meant to be a smile. "You are not under arrest, Captain. Important personages wish the pleasure of your company."

Otto did not answer the smile, and he did not move to enter the car. In silence, he looked steadily into the

other's eyes.

"I have orders," said the man. He put a hand to his breast pocket and produced a folded paper. He smiled again.

Otto made up his mind. He waved aside the paper and climbed into the car and sank into its soft upholstery.

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The S.S. officer climbed in beside him, slamming the door. The car started—and Otto saw with surprise that the glass partition behind the driver was curtained like the sidewindows. He was in an opaque, luxurious box which at once began to move. . . .

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The box came to a standstill. They had driven, Otto judged, for some fifteen minutes. They had twisted and turned on some devious route which might have led them through the heart of Berlin. The driver opened the door on the pavement side; the door nearer Otto.

Otto got out, looking about him curiously. He thought that the street, which he did not know, must be somewhere in the western suburbs. He was before a solid stone house of some size and no distinction, which stood separated by drab strips of garden from other identical houses. The S.S. officer stood beside him and the car drove quietly away.

"Come, please." His guide opened a squeaky iron gate, and Otto followed him up stone steps to a door which was opened as they reached it and closed as they passed

through.

"Wait, please." His guide disappeared into a door at the far end of the square hall. The manservant who had opened the door walked away without so much as a glance behind him.

Otto surveyed his surroundings with questioning eyes. He was in the entrance hall of what certainly seemed nothing more than the slightly old-fashioned home of some retired businessman of comfortable means and a solid bourgeois taste in decoration. And yet . . .

The tall S.S. man came back—but this time through

a door upon the other side of the hall.

"Please," he said to Otto, and led the way to the door he had first gone through. He opened it and stood aside and closed it again as Otto crossed the threshold into a small book-lined room.

A heavy-set, broad-shouldered man in civilian clothes stood up behind a desk which filled the small bay window. He raised his arm in official salute. "Heil Hitler!"

"Heil Hitler!" Otto returned the greeting.

The man came towards him now with outstretched

hand. He said, in a rich, deep voice:

"Captain Falken! I am delighted and honoured to make your acquaintance." But he did not, as normal manners demanded, give his own name nor make reference to the omission.

Otto took the hand in silence. When he did not know

what to say, he always said nothing.

The other regarded him with a benevolent smile. "You are wondering, no doubt. Your mind is full of questions, is it not?" He chuckled. "Who? . . . Why? . . . Where? . . . And what?"

Otto smiled—the chuckle was infectious. He said:

"You mean you'll give me the answers?"

The chuckle came again, richer than before. "I'm afraid not. But you will have them—and very soon." He tilted his head on one side and looked up at Otto and the smile left his face. He said:

"Captain Falken, you have already done major service for Germany and the Reich. But you are on the threshold

of far greater things!"

He looked steadily at Otto for a moment; then raised a hand and beckoned and crossed to a door in the righthand wall and threw it open.

"Captain Otto Falken!" he said loudly—and guided Otto over the threshold and closed the door behind him.

This time Otto stood in a large, square room which seemed to contain only three desks and a number of plain wooden chairs. Upon each desk were several telephones, and, upon the wall behind the central desk, a case of gigantic maps. There were three men in the room, all seated. Behind their desks they were a horse-shoe facing Otto. The flanking men behind the smaller desks were

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in civilian clothes, one bespectacled and bald; the other shaggy-haired with a wild black beard. These two did not rise. But the man behind the big desk—a man in Staff uniform and with the badges of a Generaloberst—got to his feet. His face and name were familiar to Otto, thrillingly familiar. He gave the formal salute—and Otto, very stiff at attention, replied in kind.

The General sat. He said, pointing to a chair in the

exact centre of the horse-shoe:

"Sit down, Captain." It was more order than invitation.

Otto took the chair. He sat stiffly, facing his superior

officer, ignoring the civilians.

The General's eyes, black and polished-looking beneath thin grey brows, surveyed him unfeelingly. There was a long silence. Somewhere a clock was softly ticking: it kept time with the beating of Otto's heart. He did not let his eyes fall from the General's and he did not move a muscle in his body.

The General dropped his gaze to a file upon the desk before him. He opened it with a flick of his finger. He began to read out of it—a series of statements which all ended upon a note of interrogation. Throughout his

reading he never once raised his eyes to Otto.

"Heinrich Maximilian Otto Falken?" The voice was clipped and each word had a sharp edge as if it were metal ringing against metal.

Otto knew he was to answer. "Yes, sir," he said.

"Height, six feet, one and a half inches?"

"Yes. sir."

"Weight, one hundred and eighty pounds?"

"Yes. sir."

"Born November 3, 1914?"

"Yes, sir."

"Family name originally Von Falkenhaus? Father,

Ulrich Von Falkenhaus?"

"Yes, sir." Though he never took his eyes from the clipped grey head of the General, Otto could feel the gaze of both the civilians. His collar was hot and uncomfort-

able and little beads of sweat were forming over his cheekbones.

"Both parents died in your early childhood? No

brothers or sisters?"

Otto swallowed. "That is correct, sir."

"Only known relatives, two paternal uncles? One, Ludwig, killed in action on the Western Front in 1916—the other, Karl, executed for seditious behaviour in Rittenberg, 1934?"

Otto lifted a hand towards his collar; then checked the

movement. "Yes, sir."

And so it went on, question after question, in the hard, quiet, ringing voice; question after question, answer after answer. All facts, all accurate, many of them amazingly private; things which Otto could have sworn upon his life no one could know—every fact and facet and, almost, every fancy of his life. It was all there, in that file, all of him: he felt as if he were being stripped of clothing, piece by piece, in a public square. . . .

And all the time, while his eyes were fixed upon the grey head, he could feel the four eyes watching him. . . .

Unchanging, unmodulated, the hard metal voice kept on. "On this same day," it was saying now, "you and your squadron participated in a daylight raid over the South-west Coast of England?"

"Yes, sir."

"You were escorting six Heinkel bombers? You encountered severe fighter opposition and you yourself were shot down, landing on the English Coast by parachute?"

"Yes, sir."

"You were taken prisoner and confined in a prison camp near Colchester?"

"Yes, sir."

"You were there three months and two days?"

"Yes. sir."

"You finally effected an escape and succeeded in obtaining civilian clothes and lay hidden for two days?"

"Yes, sir."

Now the General did look up. It was a sudden and unexpected movement, and Otto had difficulty in suppressing a start as the black, glittering eyes once more met his own. The General said:

"Falken, tell how you managed your return to Occu-

pied France. Concisely."

A change here. Otto did not know whether he liked it or not—but he obeyed promptly. He continued to look directly at the General, and to sit straight and stiff. He said, keeping his voice flat and toneless and without emotion:

"I hid in some woods near Colchester. I think they were game preserves. I stole food and the clothes at night. They were searching for me, but I managed to evade them. On the third night I began to move. I was trying to reach the Coast. Towards morning I found a hidingplace in some more woods. I was discovered by two men. I think they were farmers. I heard them coming and did not let them find me hiding but accosted them. I spoke in English to them. I said I was off a Swedish freighter that had been sunk. I said I was making my way to Colchester where I had relatives. They believed me and gave me directions. Later in the morning I was hiding again. I was near the sea. I heard planes and saw, very high, some bombers coming in from the sea escorted by fighters. They were ours. A fleet of Hurricanes and Spitfires went up to intercept them. I saw them climbing. There was fighting—and I saw two of our bombers come down in flames. One fell about half a mile from where I was."

He paused for a moment, moistening with his tongue lips which were very dry. The black eyes opened a little more widely and he hurried on. He said:

"It was quite early in the morning, I think about seven. I had no watch; it had been taken from me at prison camp. I stayed where I was in hiding. Above, the fighting went on. The rest of our bombers turned back but some Messerschmitts were still engaging the English planes.

Three of ours came down. I did not like it. The others turned back and followed the Heinkels. The English planes went after them—except one. This one puzzled me. It started, then came back, losing altitude. The engine sounded good and it did not seem that the plane had been hit. But it kept dropping—and eventually it landed. It landed not more than two hundred yards from where I was. The ground was bumpy and uneven but the plane did not turn over. I expected the pilot to get out—but nothing happened. I realized suddenly that he must be wounded. I had an idea. I knew that people would be coming soon, so I ran quickly to the ship. The pilot was wounded—badly: perhaps he was dead. I lifted his body out and threw it to the ground, after I'd taken off his helmet and put it on. . . "

He hesitated. He did not want to tell the rest of the story. There had been too much said about it already—

everywhere. He hoped they would let him off.

"Go on!" The metallic voice was impatient.

Otto swallowed. "I... I jumped into the plane.... I looked at the petrol gauge and found there was enough. I... I flew it. It was strange at first—but I was lucky in guessing the controls—and I found out how the forward guns worked...." He laughed without volition, a nervous little sound; then, appalled, hurried on.

"I flew straight out across the Channel. I was lucky. It was too soon for anyone to have found out that I had stolen the plane. It was a Spitfire—very good indeed . . . and—well, sir—I landed at Number Four Field, Calais.

At 9.12."

A short, barking laugh came from the civilian on Otto's left, the man with the black beard. It was the first sound either he or his colleague had made—and Otto, surprised, flashed a glance at him.

"Tell the whole story." The metallic voice was hard.

"I told you to be concise—but not to make omissions."

Otto flushed. "I am sorry, sir. About ten miles from the French Coast, I saw two English planes—Hurricanes coming towards me, about a thousand feet lower. They 19 BERLIN

were probably two of the planes that pursued the bombers. They sighted me and climbed. . . . Well, I had found out about the forward guns. . . . I was very lucky. . . . I got them both. . . . After the fight, I made my way to Calais and landed as reported. That's all, sir."

The bald civilian muttered something, then was silent. No one else said anything. The General, his head bent again, turned back some pages in the file. Otto sat

motionless.

The General looked up. "When you were escaping, in England, and these two men spoke to you: you say you addressed them in English?"

"Yes, sir."

"You learned English as a child from this Swedish governess I mentioned before—Fräulein Harben?"

"Yes, sir."

"You also learned Swedish?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have kept up your knowledge of these languages?"

Otto hesitated. "I think so, sir. At least, I have not

forgotten them."

"So." The General closed the file and made a little gesture with his hand.

Immediately the bald civilian spoke-rapidly and in

Swedish. He said:

"Captain, you would not be embarrassed by having to talk nothing but Swedish?"

Otto replied even before his mind had told him that

here was some sort of test. He said, in Swedish:

"I do not think so, mein Herr."

The General made a slight movement with his head—and the other civilian spoke in rapid English with a slight mid-western accent. He said:

"It was interesting, Captain Falken, to hear you say the British plane you flew was so good. Does that only apply to the fighter types?"

Again, though now definitely conscious of the 'test'

feeling, Otto replied promptly.

"I am not aware concerning the others," he said care-

fully. "Not from a pilot-angle."

For the first time, the General gave overt evidence that he knew the civilians were in the room. He looked from one to the other.

"Well, gentlemen?" he said.

The bald man answered first. "It seems very good, General. There is an accent—but, strangely, it sounds like a Danish one."

"Not bad for the purpose," said the man with the beard, in a curiously high-pitched voice. "An educated Swede talking English laboriously learned. The usual mistakes in syntax. No trace of German accent."

Otto wanted to look at the men as they spoke. But

he thought better of it and kept his eyes fixed upon the cold, regular, emotionless features of the General. The black, polished eyes were downcast now, as if in thought.

There was another silence. It was broken only when the General moved, stretching out a hand for the nearest of the telephones upon his desk. He took off the receiver and pressed a button set in the stand and spoke almost immediately. His fifth word astounded Otto by its implication.

"I have seen Falken, sir," he said. His voice was different now-still ringingly metallic, but softened by

respect. It was a subtle change, but startling.

The telephone cackled harshly.

"Yes, sir," said the General. Then again, after more cackling: "Yes, sir. Yes, I have. . . . Yes, they are here. They tried him: satisfactory. . . . Yes: very well, sir."

Otto, though his eyes were fixed still upon the General, was momentarily lost in whirling thought. What was all this to-do? And where did he fit into the picture, whatever it was! The man in the first room had implied that all the questions clamant in his mind would be answered -but so far they had merely increased, both in number and improbability. . . .

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He became aware, with a start, that the General was rising. Otto shot to his feet. Rigid at attention, he waited.

The General came out from behind the big desk. He was lean and spare and wonderfully tailored, but he was not so tall as Otto had thought him. He said curtly:

"Captain Falken: I am going to take you to see a man who has been following your career with interest and appreciation. You are honoured by this above your fellows." He named a name—and Otto so far forgot himself as to let out a strangled exclamation. It was a name even more illustrious than either of the two he had wildly guessed—and it was not the name of a man in any of the fighting services. . . .

fighting services. . . .

"Attention!" The metal voice rang harshly. "He is going to see you, now, and tell you what he requires of you. Neither I, nor anyone outside his own immediate counsel, knows exactly what this is except that it is work for the Fuehrer and the Reich—for Germany. Whatever it is, you will perform it to the limit of your ability—and

beyond. You understand?"

Without speaking, Otto saluted—and the General did a curious thing. He brought this strange chapter of these strange proceedings to a stranger end. He looked full into Otto's eyes with his own eyes of polished black—and he lifted his arm and gave the hail or valediction which is only used upon solemn occasions of ceremony.

"Sieg heil!" he said, and then turned on his heel, beckoning Otto to follow, and walked with ringing spurs

towards an inner door. . . .

(iv)

Three days later, in the smoking-room off the big bar of the Adlon, Major Hans Hegger was glancing, very idly because he was waiting for a girl, through the pages of an official Services gazette. He was skimming over the

pages, not really reading, when a name caught his eye. He read:

'FALKEN, OTTO (Captain): This distinguished young officer, but lately awarded Das Grosse Eiserne Kreuz for his amazingly daring and brilliant exploit in escaping from a Prison Camp in England in a stolen plane from which, over the Channel, he shot down two more enemy planes, was taken seriously ill with pneumonia immediately following the investiture. He has been removed to a Special Hospital. When—as we earnestly hope that he will—he recovers, he will be seconded for special duty, probably in the Mediterranean zone.'

"Too bad, too bad!" Hegger shook his head and muttered. "Can't afford to lose that sort of lad!"

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But Otto Falken was lost—at least for the time being. Not lost, of course, in the way which Hegger had meant in his mutterings, but lost in the Falken identity. Otto Falken was no more; in his place was one Nils Jorgensen, a Swedish boy who had spent most

of his twenty-seven years in Norway. . . .

This transmigration of personalities had taken place during the six short hours which had begun as he followed the Generaloberst upstairs in the deceptive suburban house and which had ended when, after the astounding, epic interview which followed, he had put on blue trousers and smock in the hut at the airport and then, donning the coat and comforters lent him by the silent pilot, had climbed into the little tri-motored pursuit plane. . . .

It had transported him, this plane, in more ways than one. It had carried him not only over the swift miles between Berlin and Stockholm—it had carried him from one personality to another; from one conception of his purpose and duty to another; from one way of life to a different way of life. . . .

And now, waking for the tenth morning in his new surroundings, he lay still in his bed and, as was his new, self-imposed discipline, worked over his mind until it began to feel like the mind of Nils Jorgensen and not the mind of Heinrich Maximilian Otto Falken.

This was difficult. It should, he felt every morning, be growing easier—but somehow the facility did not seem to come. Always, instead of *being* Nils Jorgensen at once, he had to start at the very beginning again, and go over that last incredible day in Berlin, dwelling particularly

upon every word of the breath-taking hour he had spent with the Personage to whom the General had taken him. . . .

He. Heinrich Maximilian Otto Falken, born Von Falkenhaus, was to perform, in another and fictitious identity, work of secret and tremendous importance to the Cause of the New Germany. . . . "This is not work, Otto Falken, which will bring you public honour! But it is vital work!" . . . He, Otto Falken, after he had properly become Nils Jorgensen, was to be a doubly secret agent of the Reich, working "in another country, unsupported among enemies"—another country which, his reason told him, must be Britain! . . . "When you reach your final destination, Falken, you will apparently be under the orders of persons who think they are your superiors. You must obey these orders. But, at the same time, you will obey orders which you have received directly from myself Which practically means, Falken, directly from the Fuehrer!" . . . Yet he was not told in so many words where this great work would ultimately lie. . . . "It is not safe to tell you too much, Falken. You will receive orders in proper gradation, as and when they are necessary! . . . The work—or, rather, the first step in the work was to become Nils Jorgensen. When he was Nils Jorgensen, he would receive the first instalment of his orders. Therefore, the sooner he fully assumed the new personality, the sooner could he begin this vitally important, this tremendously exciting, service to his country.... He knew how the orders would come: someone, somewhere, at some time, would show him the pencil.- If he were still in doubt after this, he must casually introduce a question as to the time—and then, if he were answered in the form which was burned into his memory, he would know. . .

He lay very still in the bed, his eyes screwed tightly shut. . . . Now for the second step of the exercise—a rehearsal in his mind of Nils' physical surroundings. . . .

Nils' room—this room where he lay—was an attic in the house of Axel Christensen, carpenter. The house of 25 SWEDEN

Axel Christensen was on the outskirts of the village of Kornemunde, some thirty miles from Stockholm. Below, abutting on to the eastern side of the house, was the long barn-like workshop in which Axel plied his trade of joiner and carpenter and in which he himself would presently be at work—for a little, public part of the time helping Axel with local orders, for the rest attaining, under Axel's teaching, proficiency in such arts of carpentry, joinery and the like as would qualify him for the part of carpenter's mate (or whatever they called it) upon an ocean-going ship. . . . Downstairs, immediately below the stiff and silent and hardly-ever-used parlour, which in turn was directly below his attic, came the kitchen—and there, very shortly, he would eat. . . .

So much for the geography! Now for Nils himselt—and his wherefore and why! Nils (never forget!) is nephew to Axel Christensen, a brother of his mother's. Nils has never before this visit seen his uncle—but his uncle, upon receiving the frightful news that his sister and her Norwegian husband, resident in the unfortunate northern half of Norway, had been killed by a German bomb, made haste to summon his nephew (absent at sea at the time of the catastrophe) and take him under his wing and set him to work in the 'shop.' Axel hopes (don't forget) that his husky, skilful, personable, craftsmanlike nephew will make his stay permanent; will not, as other mates and apprentices seem so often to have done before, leave him suddenly and selfishly. . . . Axel says nothing (nor must Nils) of the instruction in sea-going carpentry. . .

All right! Part Two of the programme is over. . . . Now for Part Three—and Nils can get up and go about

this strange new world believing he is part of it!

Part Three is more fun than its predecessors, because he can use his senses. . . .

Relaxed, he lay in the over-soft feather-bed and rolled luxuriously and stretched himself and opened his eyes. Above him were dark beams of oak, black save for the dapplings of gold made by such rays of the early slanting sun as struggled through the skylight window. Then, as

he dropped his eyes, there were the clean whitewashed walls, and the high dresser of dark, time-polished pine, and, on the far wall, the picture which (they said) was of Axel's mother—and the washstand—and the little, gatelegged table—and the four great packing cases—and the curtain-covered corner for clothes—and all the rest. . . .

The air smelt wonderful, and the sunshine was not

pale—and there stirred in Otto an anger.

"Soft!" said Otto without sound, and threw the covers

from him—and then angrily reprimanded himself.

"Splendid morning!" said Nils aloud, and swung his legs to the floor and fished his watch from under the pillows and found the time to be seven. . . .

(ii)

He pulled on blouse and trousers and grabbed a thick brown towel (he must remember never to find the colour unusual!) and, taking his thick shoes in his hand, ran down the stairs and let himself out of the side-door near the kitchen.

Outside, the sun was warm and the air itself cold and tingling, so that it stung the skin with a sudden, exhilarating bite before the sun could warm it. He made his way through the kitchen-garden to the door in the white fence. He opened the door and stepped through it and closed it quickly behind him and was in the common-land meadow which made a huge triangle bounded by the mill-stream and Axel's dwelling and the mill-house itself. He began to run without waiting to put on his shoes. The coarse weedgrasses stabbed at his feet. They hurt, and he felt better. He slowed to a walk, the heavy shoes bouncing and jerking around his neck, and made a bee-line for the mill-pond. Over the stream, past the fertile fields, the sudden small mountains rose—a mile, twenty, sixty miles away. They were white-capped, and blue against the green and gold and brown of the tilled earth at their feet. The sun grew 27 SWEDEN

warmer and softened more and more the bite of the early spring air. Small creatures made scurrying rustles in the grass and the hedges, and a lark startlingly sang above his head. From the mill-house chimney a thin blue-grey streamer of smoke reached up uncertainly—and from the fields behind him came a velvety lowing of cattle.

It was peaceful—idyllic—beautiful—unreal! The air smelt soft and sweet—and yet was sharp and heady. And the little mountains were incredibly beautiful in their

baby ruggedness.

Otto began to run again; there was a lump coming in his throat, for no reason at all, and he grew angry again.

"Soft!" said Otto violently—and then took himself to task, violently, for not being Nils, to whom all this would doubtless seem ordinary and pleasant and right. . . .

But there was nothing (surely there was nothing?) to prevent Nils Jorgensen from plunging into the searing-cold water of the mill-pond—and swimming—and climbing out and shivering until the sun warmed his aching muscles back to life—and then diving in again—and staying in the clear dark water until the coldness clamped iron fingers around his heart and lungs with such grisly force that he must use all the strength of his will to make the frigid muscles obey his mind and propel his body three times, fast, around the pool before he clambered out through the reeds. . . .

(iii)

Nils came back to the house, hard and tight and glowing, to find his Aunt Kirsten cooking already, while his cousin Gertrud laid the blue-bordered white cloth upon the big white-pine table in the bay-window of the kitchen. Pots bubbled upon the great stove, and there was the vivid, tingling smell of bacon frying.

There was also another smell—a forbidden, delicious

scent-the gritty-gold aroma of brewing coffee.

Nils' Aunt Kirsten giggled as her nephew sniffed the air.

"That uncle of yours!" she said. "He will have his coffee. I keep telling him the neighbours will smell it out and then he'll be reported for hoarding. But he has to have it!"

Gertrud, very busy with her table-setting, spoke to him

softly. She said:

"You have been swimming, Nils? . . . B'rr!" She shook her pretty shoulders and her breasts quivered tautly

beneath the print frock. "You are brave!"

Gertrud was brown-haired and small and slimly rounded. She was like her mother in feature, but had Axel's colouring. Her eyes were large and of a soft, warm brownness—and her teeth, when she smiled, were very white against her red lips. She was eighteen and shyly ardent. She said again:

"You are brave, Nils!"

Otto mumbled a reply, without looking at her. He wished she were not around. He wished she were not here at all. He wished she would not speak to him. She made it increasingly difficult to be Nils, because he could not take the pleasure in her existence which any young man must take in so attractive a cousin; any young man, that is, except Otto Falken. If only Gertrud did not so irresistibly remind him of the girl in Paris; the girl whose eyes had blazed fierce and contemptuous and unreasoning hatred; the girl who, for some obscure and infuriating reason, he knew he would never be able to dismiss from memory.

He went upstairs, telling Aunt Kirsten he would only be a moment. He found a clean blouse and pulled it on. He brushed his damp hair violently and was pleased that the wiry blond curls seemed darker and more orderly than usual. He dusted his heavy shoes, which bore a Norwegian trademark, and even polished with a handkerchief the heavy brass buckle of the belt which held up the working trousers of felt-like blue cloth. He did all these things as Nils would do them—and yet, all the time, that Parisian incident was running through Otto's mind.

It had been so—so weirdly unlikely a thing to happen,

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especially in a country such as France, whose people had seen the light in time and saved themselves and were happy in the New Order and safe in the protection of the Reich. It had happened during those seventy-six hours of pleasantly lionized leave he had enjoyed in Paris after he had safely landed the British plane in Calais, mercifully saved from anti-aircraft fire by the fact that the Channel fight had been witnessed and his nationality guessed. He had been fêted and complimented by an Air-Marshal, and taken to Paris and shown the sights, and dined and wined, and had songs sung to him from the stage of a theatre, and been presented to a lovely chanteuse whom he had come to know well and who had been very. very nice to him. He had had, indeed, the time of his young life. Until the morning when, his leave expired, he ceased with automatic suddenness to be a hero and became again a young Flight Commander under orders to proceed immediately to Berlin and report himself. He had, it turned out, the whole forenoon to himself, for the plane that was to carry him to Berlin did not leave until the early afternoon. He determined that it would be interesting to see Paris, or some of it, unheralded, unescorted and afoot. He realized, not without a twinge of well-earned headache, that he had not, really, seen any Paris at all. So he left his hotel, and sent his newly acquired baggage to the Air Field, and went out into the streets and drifted—a common enough sight in these days, a tall, beautifully built young Aryan warrior, very smart in his uniform, very military in his carriage.

He was passing the Madeleine when it happened. There was a high curb, and a little press of people, all natives, in front of him. They surged forward—and the girl, twisting her foot in its high-heeled shoe upon the edge of the curb, collapsed in front of him and would have fallen had he not, very quickly, put an arm around her. It was an instinctively helpful act and one impossible to construe in any other way. She was a very pretty girl, literally alight with the quality to which her countrymen gave the word chic so frequently mistreated in other lands. To keep her

upright, Otto was forced, as his arm went around her, to swing her about, slightly clear of the ground, and set her down upon her feet again face to face with him, It was also necessary, if she were to retain her balance after this whirligig rescue, momentarily to keep the rescuing arm around her. So they were chest to chest, with Otto's arm around her waist, supporting her. He smiled happily down at her and tried to say something in very halting, inadequate French—but before the initial 'Mademoiselle' was completely uttered, he was seared by the blazing, contemptuous hatred which flared up at him from the dark He was so staggered, so astounded, so mentally shaken, that he did not even think to remove the arm. He just stared. And then there had been three hissing words between the clenched white teeth, and small hands which thrust against his chest with surprising, hurtful force. He removed the arm. It dropped nervously to his side and hung there while he went on staring. And then the small face, contorted by a passion of disgusted hatred, was thrust upwards towards his own—and she spat!

In the attic room of the house of Axel Christensen, Otto Falken stared with unseeing eyes at his reflection in the spotted mirror on the dresser and raised a hand to his face and rubbed at his cheek just as he had done as he stood by the curb near the Madeleine—and as he always did, though he never wanted to, he saw vividly in his mind the beautiful little face again, twisted with that deep, utterly

irrational, soul-shaking hatred.

(iv)

He went down to breakfast, very determinedly Nils. Uncle Axel was there now, and all four of them sat down to the meal, Aunt Kirsten and Gertrud sharing the work of serving. It was a very good meal, despite the prevailing shortage, at which Axel grumbled unceasingly, in some things like butter and preserves. Nils ate largely and did

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not talk. Axel buried himself behind the Stockholm newspaper, passing sheet after sheet to Aunt Kirsten as he finished them. Gertrud made a tentative remark or two, mostly to Nils; then gave up as he merely smiled in her direction without replying.

The meal was nearly over when Aunt Kirsten exclaimed in horror at something she was reading. Everyone looked at her curiously, even her husband lowering the

page he was intent upon.

"Oh!" said Aunt Kirsten. "Oh, it's . . . it's dread-

ful! Dreadful!"

She had chanced upon a description of the plight of some Norse families in the bitter country around Narvik; families who, in the fighting months before, had been bombed out of their homesteads and then decided, with more bravery than sense, to stay where they were and remake something of what was left rather than join the swelling tide of refugees to the south.

She began to read aloud the passages that had moved her to horror—and then was stricken with remorse as Nıls, with a mumbled apology, pushed aside his coffee,

unfinished, and hurriedly left the kitchen.

"Tchk, tchk!" muttered Axel, and went back to his

reading.

Gertrud's brown eyes glistened with tears. "How could you!" she said to her mother. "How could you be so callous! To remind the poor boy like that!"

Kirsten shook her head. She said sadly:

"I don't know what I can have been thinking of! . . And not a twelvemonth since the poor laddie's own parents were struck down in their own house. . . ."

Otto went straight to the workshop. He was pleased with himself. That had been very Nils-like behaviour: he believed, when he came to think it over, that he had even felt, as he left the kitchen, like a man whose beloved parents have recently been slaughtered in an accident of war.

He rolled up the sleeves of his blouse and began to set out his tools. He paused suddenly, smitten by selfcriticism: 'an accident of war'! That was not the right thought for Nils. If there were a Nils, and his parents had been killed by a necessary German bomb, Nils would not think of this as any 'accident'—he would inevitably see this personal and unavoidable disaster as a fiendish crime, sadistically planned and executed by brutal barbarians. . . .

It was cold in the workshop, and Otto shivered. He came out of the immobility of thought and went to work. He must be careful to repair immediately this mental attitude of Nils: it was, after all, only what he had been told -first in the upper room of the Berlin suburban house, latterly and all the time by Axel Christensen. While he worked upon a slab of pine with the big plane, warmth creeping back to his body with the powerful strokes, he pondered upon the subject of Axel. A remarkable person! Who was he? Of course, in some way, in the service of the Reich—but exactly in what way? And in what standing? And what, really, was his nationality? And were Kirsten and her daughter Axel's wife and daughter? And, whether they were or not, did either or both of them know what Axel's real work was? Did Axel have the power to pass finally upon the ability of Otto Falken to perform, in the shape of Nils Jorgensen, the work for which he had been selected? What, exactly, was this work? Granted that it must be in England, what did it entail? And what would be its effect at the end? . . .

Axel came in as the planing was nearly done. He nodded to Otto, and crossed to his own private bench, where he stood, looking down at his tools in his habitual, somehow minatory silence. He was a tall, solid, stoopshouldered man with a dense thatch of grey-brown hair, his eyes dark and unreadable and staring behind thicklensed, iron-framed spectacles.

Otto, wrapping himself in Nils, got on with his work. He did not see that Axel had left the bench and moved over on quiet feet to stand just behind him. He did not know this until Axel spoke—very calmly, very casually and in his 'workshop' as opposed to his 'duty instructional'

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voice. And he asked a simple, ordinary, every-day question; a question which he had probably asked of his new apprentice five or six times in the past ten days. But he asked it in German. He said, in German:

"Where is the small finishing plane?"

Otto, wrapped up in his work—as Nils should be wrapped up in his work—replied without looking up. But he replied, instinctively, in the language in which he had been addressed; in his own language. He said, in German:

"On your own bench. I put it back last night."

Perhaps he was going to say m' e—but he did not, for a heavy hand fell on his shoulder and roughly jerked him around so that he was face to face with Axel, who was almost as tall as he, and his eyes were looking directly into the staring, unreadable eyes behind the thick, concave lenses. And then Axel's right hand, its palm hard and calloused and heavy, struck him with a ringing, stunning clap across the left side of his face. Although it was struck with the open hand, the blow was so heavy, and so utterly, astonishingly unexpected, that Otto reeled. He might, indeed, have fallen had it not been for the edge of the work-bench which, crashing painfully against his back, held him upright.

He thrust himself away from it, his face lividly pale save for the angry red of the injured cheek. For an infinitesimal division of time, it was his intention to hurl himself at this man who had struck him; then, immediately, discipline locked iron fingers around his mind and he dropped his hands and stood, gazing at Axel

in silence.

Axel did not move. He said, in Swedish:

"So! It is that way we treat silly children!" He paused for a long moment. "And that is what you are—a foolish child!" There was bitter contempt in the quiet, heavy voice. "I speak to you in German—and you answer in German!"

Axel's left hand was raised now, slowly and with deliberation. Otto saw the blow coming; but he did not

move as the horny palm, with a blow fully as weighty as the first, fell across the other cheek. His head rang, but he hardly blinked the vivid blue eyes. He stood rigid now, at attention.

"Now, Nils Jorgensen," said the heavy, soft voice, "perhaps you will remember that you do not know the German language; not one single word of it! You may, perhaps, recognize it as German when it is spoken in your hearing—but even that is doubtful! . . . Get on with your work."

Otto, with heavy heart and face burning with shame and bruises, turned back to his bench. . . .

3 SWEDEN, STOCKHOLM

NILS JORGENSEN had a day off and was bound for Stockholm. He dressed in his best blue suit, which was of astonishing colour and cut, and his Aunt Kirsten tied his tie, and Axel gave him some extra money and Gertrud pouted unhappily at the thought of the girls he would see and perhaps talk with. And they all saw him safely aboard the strangely shaped single-deck bus which was the only road connection between Kornemunde and the city.

They found Nils a seat to himself, right behind the driver, and waved to him until the bus was out of sight around the bend in the road by the church, and he waved back.

The bus bumped and jiggled over the little bridge and came on to the smoother surface of the high road and gathered speed Nils settled comfortably in his seatand Otto began to think. It was a full two weeks since the reprimand for his gross mistake; two weeks during which —he knew it, though no word of praise had been addressed to him—he had made good progress; two weeks during which he had begun, at safe times and only when alone, to become bored and impatient. Several times in the last two or three days he had been on the point of taking the plunge and at some suitable moment asking Axel how much longer he was to stay here in Kornemunde, but always, he thanked his stars, he had put it off. And now here he was, on the way to Stockholm—and something. He did not know what awaited him because Axel had said nothing except that it was time he had a day off and went into Stockholm and enjoyed himself. Nothing more than

that—and nothing that he would not have said to a genuine Nils. But there had been something different in the eyes behind their thick glass—and, besides, for Otto Falken at this time there neither were nor should be holidays. Yes—something was going to happen in Stockholm; but what? And where, now he came to think of it? He felt in his breast-pocket to make sure the pencil was there; then drifted into musing with delighted admiration over the thoroughness of this great machine of which he was now a cog—and the amazing invisibility of its flawless machination.

He arrived in Stockholm just before noon. He wandered, managing to reconcile smoothly enough the bucolic awe proper to Nils with the genuine interest felt by Otto. Both Nils and Otto liked Stockholm and everything about it—its wide streets and its stone buildings and its parks and its people and its general air of making business a pleasure. But, while it was all matter for gaping to Nils, there was, for Otto, a certain unreality about the whole small, neat metropolis: it was as if this were a place apart from the stern and actual world; a place where everyone and everything pretended to be real and alive and occupied with the work of existence upon this planet, but a place which, in fact, was completely separate from the Earth and the problems of its people.

He wandered about—and went on wandering. He ate good food in an unpretentious little café near the main railway station, and went into a museum, and loafed around a pretty, obviously imaginary little park, and had a strange, throat-burning drink in a bar which was crowded with men

who unmistakably followed the sea.

It was nearing four in the afternoon before he began to grow worried. In all his miles of meandering he had neither seen nor heard any hint of anything which might be the something for which he was so anxiously waiting. And yet he was sure that he had been ordered here, and for a definite purpose—and therefore if he had missed the something, it must be his own fault. Had he made some fantastic, some puerile mistake which would disgrace him?

Should he, for instance, have just waited where he was when he had stepped off the bus? Surely not—since, in the absence of any other orders, it was his duty to be Nils Jorgensen—and this loafing and wandering and gaping must be proper to Nils! Should he, perhaps, as the pencil was the only 'sign' which he had, have been at pains to show it casually in every place he visited? Surely not, since the others must know him and therefore take the initial step.

Well, then, what was the matter? Why didn't something happen? . . . He decided, for the want of more striking idea, that it might be as well if he stepped sufficiently out of his conception of Nils' character as to visit parts of the town which he had hitherto avoided; parts which it seemed to him would frighten Nils by their luxury

and sophistication.

This decision brought him, at some time before five, to the terraced restaurant of the Carolus; the restaurant which, although it is roofed and part of the main hotel building, seems nevertheless to be, very delightfully, part garden and part pavement. It was easy enough to act the part of Nils as he entered: his clothes, and the covert smiles which they aroused in neat men and soignée women, were sufficient insult to his personal, bodily pride to make the necessary, inner feeling of being Nils-awkward, embarrassed, out-of-place—very easy to attain. He stumbled to a corner table upon the lowest terrace. Scarlet-faced, he ordered aquavit from the card which the waiter tendered him and, when it came, discovered it to be the same burning drink that he had had in the place which was full of sailors. Only this was better stuff-much better. He felt less worried when he'd taken half of it. It was like the vodka he'd had in Paris, only pleasanter. He finished it and ordered another. He felt much better; there was no denying it. He knew his own capacity, though, and was in no danger, even with strange liquors, of allowing his mind to become even clouded. But he suddenly realized, halfway through the second drink, that he had been overanxious. There was nothing, in the absence of orders,

which they could have expected him to do that he had not done. He must simply wait. He pressed his hand to his coat, over the breast-pocket, and felt the outline of the

pencil again.

He had a puddle of liquor left in his glass, and was thinking of finishing it and leaving this place when he saw the little priest come in and sit at a table across the aisle. He watched, with inward amusement, someone even clumsier and less at home in his surroundings than any Nils Jorgensen. The priest was small and plump and untidy, and he dropped things and overturned a glass of water and fumbled with the menu and grew embarrassed beneath the cold scrutiny of the waiter and eventually ordered soup.

Otto shifted his gaze for a moment—and saw the girl two tables down from the priest. Perhaps girl was the wrong word, though, because it implied, for Otto at least, a certain immaturity; a naiveté—even perhaps a quality of innocence. Gertrud, now, was a girl, as had been her prototype in Paris. . . .

Otto bit his lip, frowning. He forgot to be Nils for a moment; then recalled himself with a start. He looked at the young woman again. She was dressed very simply and in exquisite taste. She was charming; much too charming to be alone. Though she was unlike as might be in feature and colouring, she somehow managed to remind him of his Parisian singer. He looked again, remembering to be loutishly bashful. She was reading a magazine as she sipped at a cocktail. She looked up as if she felt Otto's eyes. She was blonde, with eyes of deep, dark blue, and her mouth was full-lipped and large and generous. Her dark, simple coat, with its high collar of rich fur, was thrown open, and beneath the grey silk of her dress she curved deliciously.

Their gazes met and mingled for a second which seemed an hour to Otto, starved since Paris of any real society of the other sex.

Then she dropped her eyes to the magazine again—and Otto, the waiter at his elbow, ordered coffee. He would not go now, he would wait. The blank glance from those eyes had had something behind it; some awareness of his

existence and effect; some recognition which he was just old and experienced enough to know as a sign that boded well.

His coffee came and he sipped at it—and dared another stare: it was still sufficiently in the manner of Nils, but he put, as it were, more behind it. Again she raised her eyes as if she sensed that his were upon her. And this time an electric thrill transfixed Otto. And this time, before she dropped her eyes to the magazine again, the almost invisible ghost of a smile creased the corners of her mouth.

He finished the coffee and ordered more, and kept on looking, trying to combine the outward manner of a Nils with an inner message from his eyes. With each interchange, her dark-blue eyes grew more frankly interested, until at last they seemed to have an answer in them to the

thrills which permeated him.

Then he saw with a sudden despair that she was paying her bill. The waiter took the note which she gave him and fumbled to make change and finally hurried away to get it while she collected handbag and gloves and pulled the furcollared coat about her and glanced at a tiny, glittering watch upon her wrist. Otto stared sullenly, despondent—and then, on an instant, was plucked from his depths by a flash from her eyes and the slightest, almost imperceptible, movement of her head towards the door; a movement which made his heart leap up into his throat.

He was fortunate to catch the eye of his own waiter almost at once. He paid his bill, with some Nils-like fumbling in a massive ring-purse, as quickly as he might—and was making awkward way out to the street within a minute of her departure. He saw her in the vestibule, selecting something from the pile of papers on the newsstand. Somewhat un-Nils-like, he did not pause nor give any sign that he was aware of her but went out, shambling, through the revolving door and on to the pavement. He moved away from the entrance and the brilliant patch of light from the lamps they had just switched on against the sudden dusk. He took up his stand further down the pavement, beneath one of the trees which lined this whole

thoroughfare, sprouting surprisingly from square inlets of dark soil in the paving.

He waited—and took counsel with himself. He was here in Stockholm to wait, and to wait, surely, in the manner of Nils. So there could be no possible wrong in Nils' seeing how this adventure might turn out. . . .

He waited, for several minutes which seemed interminable. Then she came out of the hotel and turned in his direction. He watched her with rising admiration and excitement as she came towards him. She was tall, but not overly tall: she was erect without effort. And her hips swung gracefully as she moved.

With one casual-seeming glance over her shoulder, she came directly towards him. She was smiling fully now—and her charm miraculously was doubled. He stood away from the tree and waited for her. His heart was beating

violently and his breath was short.

She halted in front of him, fairly close. And she spoke, in a deep, very faintly husky voice which matched the rest of her. She said:

"This is very . . . curious of me, to behave like this. You think so, too, don't you?"

But she said it in German.

Time, of course, is purely relative, which is doubtless why it seemed so long to Otto before he answered. Actually, he did so with a scarcely perceptible pause which, even had it been noticed, would have been no more than natural; but so much conflict raged inside him, so many questions were asked and answered in his head, so great a decision taken and acted upon, that it seemed to him an unconscionable time until he spoke. He cursed his luck, for her obviously genuine racial kinship made her even more desirable. . . . He asked himself how it could possibly matter if he pretended to a slight knowledge of German, gained by Nils while at sea, since here was so obviously a woman who could have no connection whatsoever, with espionage, direct or counter. . . . If he made some reply, enough to see where the adventure would end, how could he possibly be wrong? . . . And suppose it did end as he had been so ardently hoping, what harm could come when she was so patently of a class and position which must make any association with a Nils Jorgensen very necessarily clandestine to the nth degree? . . . If only he wasn't so certain that the whole thing would come to nothing, its flimsy structure fall in ruins, if he did not understand her language and became in truth the oaf which some strange chemical reaction between them had made her see as something else! . . .

But he looked straight at her and made his eyes blank

and shrugged lumpishly and said:

"What you say? I don't understand."

And he said it in Nils' thickened, Dane-accented Swedish.

She looked at him, and the dark-blue eyes blinked once and grew cold, and the smile faded from her mouth and she turned directly about and walked quickly away.

Ápathetically, Otto leaned back against his tree. He did not even watch her go. He felt tired and empty, and cursed himself for an over-conscientious fool.

(ii)

He was still standing there when the little priest came up to him. It was quite dark now, and all the street lamps were on, and it was growing very cold. He had probably leaned there, slouched against the tree, for some thirty minutes. He was wrapped in grey gloom, and for the first time since Berlin regretting life in the Luftwaffe. He started when the little man spoke to him, and peered down through the darkness at the strange, dumpy figure with its shapeless, bundle-like coat and floppy, curl-brimmed hat. But he did not answer.

"Never mind," said the priest, very gently. "It doesn't matter."

There was something in the voice which made Otto

feel ashamed. He brought his mind to attention with considerable effort. He said:
"I'm sorry. What was it you wanted?"

The priest, who had begun to move away, turned back. Hè said, his head tilted to look up at Otto:

"I have to note something down. My memory, you . I was wondering . . . Could you lend me a

pen, perhaps? . . . Or a pencil would do. . . ."

"Huh?" Otto's tone was sharp. He was momentarily startled by the word pencil; then, looking down at his questioner again, grew amused by his own ridiculous imaginings. He laughed inwardly, and felt much better.

"I think I have one," he said—and began to grope in his pockets, searching for the ordinary stub which he had brought in addition to the pencil in his breast-pocket.

The tree was in a circle of darkness made blacker by its own shadow—and the priest began, while Otto was delving into one pocket after another, to edge towards the streetlamp between the tree and the hotel-entrance. He too was searching in his pockets, and Otto moved automatically with him, until they were both on the very edge of the bright pool of light.

'I'm sorry." Otto was fumbling furiously. "I know I've a bit of pencil somewhere." He wondered why he was taking so much trouble with the old idolator. Maybe it would be all right to let him use the pencil. No, perhaps safer not—though there could be nothing more ordinary to

look at to the uninitiated eye.

While he still delved, now into his hip-pockets, the little man took something from some recess in the shapeless coat. He said:

"You see, I broke my own pencil . . . the last

He held out something to Otto, thrusting the hand which held it into the light: it was a pencil; a cheap, utterly ordinary propelling pencil, indistinguishable from any which might be cheaply bought in any stationery store throughout Europe or even America. But in one vital respect it was identical with that in Otto's breast-pocket:

its original white-metal cap, which had probably once held the usual piece of eraser, had been removed and a clumsy, obviously home-made wooden plug had been substituted. . . .

Otto's heart jumped violently: he hoped the shock had not been visible to other eyes. He managed to say, casually:

"Too bad! I'll find mine in a minute," and study his companion thoroughly for the first time. He realized that he had seen him before: he had sat at the table next the beautiful German. He wondered . . .

But he was cautious. It could do no harm to be cautious. After all, a little man like this might conceivably—as anyone very possibly but improbably might—lose the top of a cheap pencil and replace it with a plug of wood roughly shaped with a pocket-knife! He applied the test. He said:

"By the way, do you happen to know what time it is? I've a train to catch. . . ."

The little priest, with a worried look of concentration, started to undo the buttons of the shapeless, enveloping coat. It took him quite a long time. When he had them undone, he reached inside, to another coat presumably, and at last brought his hand out bearing a huge pumpkin of a watch, its case of gunmetal, attached to a heavy silver chain. He moved the monstrosity into the light and peered at it carefully. He said, with gentle surprise:

"Why, it's seventy-one past, or earlier. . . . I'd no

ideal . . ."

And then Otto knew. He waited, and nothing happened—and then produced his own pencil and watched in amazement while the priest made some careful and, Otto was sure, meaningless scratches upon a piece of paper.

He looked up at Otto with a shy, kindly smile. "Thank you," he said in the gentle voice and returned the pencil. "If you are going this way, perhaps we might walk together? . . ."

(iii)

And so Otto did not return to Kornemunde. Instead, at the frigid grey hour of five a.m. upon the next morning, he boarded the S.S. Lars Bjolnar. She was a timber freighter of some eight thousand tons—and Nils was duly signed upon her.

He left the blue suit behind him, but each piece of the stout and serviceable and well-used seaman's clothing he wore was crudely marked with the name N. Jorgensen in indelible ink and a caligraphy which he himself might have

thought was his own.

More, he had a well-loaded dussel bag—and in it, besides spare clothing, a sizeable locked strong-box of battered metal. In this box, besides many other necessary things such as his official Identity Card and his seaman's papers, was a whole background, meticulously compiled, for Nils Jorgensen, comprising such precise and likely data as yellowed old photographs and snapshots of Nils' father and mother; of Nils himself (it was astonishing how closely the infants and boys resembled Otto Falken); and of their farmhouse in northern Norway. There were also such matters as a beribboned lock of blond hair, a small tattered Bible signed by Jorgensen père et mère—and much more. . . .

As he contemplated these things, Otto was again overcome by awe-stricken admiration for the godlike thoroughness of the great Machine which now, for Germany's sake, controlled him. And he wondered increasingly, with each passing hour of this monotonous voyage towards Lisbon, what subtle and intricate steps would be taken to secure the unobtrusive entrance of Nils Jorgensen to Britain: he was more certain than ever, now, that this must be his destination.

For no one had told him, yet, that he was going to America!

4 ATLANTIC:

First Phase

They did not, in fact, tell him until he was in Lisbon, and already—by a curious and amazingly fortuitous-seeming set of circumstances—on the way to becoming a crew-member of the fifteen-thousand-ton *Vulcania*, which flew the red ensign of Britain and was New York bound and had only touched at Lisbon, it seemed, for twenty-four hours of minor repairs.

It had all been very curious, extremely exciting—and further proof of the incredible, minute precision with which the hidden Machine did its work; a precision so delicate that even he himself had not sensed the first link in the chain as being anything but an uninspired and extremely annoying trick of chance. It was not, indeed, until his course was crossed by the third of the planned events that he realized the chain for what it was and became at ease in his troubled mind.

The first thing was the interview, just as they sighted Lisbon, with fat old Captain Svensen of the Lars Bjolnar. Svensen had told him of orders from his owners, received by radio, to the effect that his crew must be cut down. He had even shown the message, to prove that his forthcoming dismissal of Otto was none of his fault. He was very kindly, and appeared genuinely distressed.

Then, just as Otto, ashore and shipless, was desperately worrying as to what he should do next in view of this unexpected intrusion of Fate into the plans of the Reich in so far as they concerned Otto Falken, had come the chance meeting in the tavern with the grizzled Norwegian, bos'un of

the Lars Biolnar. And then the hailing of the bos'un by the little English quartermaster; and the round of drinksand then, as the Englishman, upon hearing that Nils Jorgensen was without a ship, became suddenly interested, the realization that the Machine had been at work the whole time!

The Englishman left soon, and before anything was settled-but Otto, in his new-found knowledge, did not He just waited. He was learning fast, and knew that it was worse than useless to search for the Machine: when it was ready, and when it wanted him, it would stretch out a long steel tentacle and find him.

It did, within an hour of his leaving the tavern. found him in the street as he was making for the unsavoury sailors' dormitory where he had a bed. Out from a low, sagging little doorway over which, with that haphazard interchangeability of B and V which distinguishes the Portuguese language as it is written, appeared the sign 'Bom Bino,' a man staggered across Otto's path. He was a large man, fat and tall and heavy and very drunk. Otto sidestepped to avoid him; then nearly fell over the bulk as it collapsed at his feet, a great belch coming from its throat and a cascade of papers from its coat pocket.

Otto might have moved on—he was not kindly disposed towards sottishness. But he could not move, for the fallen sot had a strong arm wound about his ankles. So Otto stooped to disengage the arm—and saw, lying atop of the scattered papers, a cheap little pencil of the propelling kind whose metal top had been replaced by a crudely fitted

piece of wood. . . .

He did not disengage the arm and go on his way. Instead, he became very busy in helping the fallen, picking up his belongings, setting him up on unsteady feet and

restoring a semblance of order to his clothes.

The man, an arm about Otto's shoulders, sang cheerfully all the while. He was even bigger than Otto had thought, and he stank vilely of Bino which was from Bom. From his round, greasy blue-jowled face to his scarred and shapeless yellow shoes, he was as native to the peculiar town of Lisbon as his shapeless, bile-green suit. He looked as if he might be (as indeed he partially was) the fairly prosperous owner of a large and cheap and dirty restaurant.

It was in a small and windowless and fly-blown office behind this restaurant, now closed and shuttered for the night, that he eventually faced Otto across a desk and abandoned all pretence of drunkenness and became coldeved and distant and impersonally authoritative. He told Otto, clearly and concisely, several things—and the first of them was that the immediate future of Nils Jorgensen lay in the United States, to which country he would go as part of the ship's company of the Vulcania. He did not allow any pause, even the slightest, in which Otto might properly digest this tremendous surprise, but went on with further instructions. He told Otto what to do when the Vulcania docked, and how to ensure that the right person should find him easily. And, very particularly, he told Otto several things which he must not do after reaching America—for the Americans, he explained, were a strange, childish and

altogether irrational people.

The interview took the better part of an hour, and they both talked in German, because Otto had neither Spanish nor Portuguese, and could not make headway with the other's English. It gave Otto a strange sensation, this quick, low-voiced talk in his mother tongue: it made him vividly alive to the deadly reality of his work and yet, in these odd surroundings and talking to this most unlikely person, tinted everything with a dreamlike quality highly disconcerting. So disconcerting, in fact, that he was guilty of a lapse which, when he came to recall it later, made him flush with shame and wonder miserably whether it would be recorded as a mark against him. After the orders had been given and Otto had twice repeated them faultlessly, he asked a question which was not germane to the field which had been covered. He asked of what specific nature his work in America would be-and was abashed by the stony stare which his words evoked and by the three curt words in which he was told that orders would be given him when necessary. . . .

(ii)

So here he was—a carpenter's mate aboard the British ship *Vulcania*, and already forty-three hours out from Lisbon. And he was very busy. There was a great amount of work for the ship's carpenter and his help; work caused by the unusual nature of the *Vulcania's* cargo. He had not known the nature of this cargo before going aboard, partly by reason of the haste in which arrangements were made, and partly, no doubt, by reason of his inability to read the Portuguese newspapers. He had known, of course, that she was a British ship—but what he had not known was that she was carrying to America an oversize shipload of women and children; four hundred and fifty-three of them, to be exact.

When he found out, as of course he had to within two minutes of setting his foot aboard, his first reaction was one of distaste. He examined himself about this and found what seemed to be an answer: surrounded by an ordinary ship's company of Englishmen he would have felt happy and proud—a lone and daring soldier in an enemy encampment. But this way, with the vast preponderance of the surrounding foe being women and children, he felt uneasy and, in some vague, unspecified way, ill-used. Although it would not have occurred to him to put it this way, he felt, perhaps, as Tristan might have felt at being compelled by the sudden and unexpected presence of Guinevere to desist from planning to overthrow Lancelot.

He consoled himself by the thought that the state of things in Britain must be even more precarious than he had imagined—and went on with his work. He did not see much of the crew, save for the ship's carpenter himself and two other assistants. One of these was a Scotsman, big and dour and unhappy; the other a brisk, cheerful and talkative Cockney. Otto had as little to do with them as he might and, indeed, only spoke at all in order to oil his English. He found it difficult to understand the Scot and, at first, well-nigh impossible to understand the Cockney,

who insisted upon keeping up a running fire of talk whenever he and Otto were together. He was a cheerful, malicious little person called Bates, and most of the talk he poured upon Otto was derisive chaff based upon the obvious fact that Nils Jorgensen was a 'foreigner.'

At first this did not worry Otto at all, especially as it was rarely, save when Bates' tone grew unusually acid or Otto happened to meet the bright, twinkling, cruel little eyes, that he knew what the man was talking about. But by the fourth day of what he had gathered was to be an eight-day voyage, he was understanding much better—and he did not like what he was hearing.

"'Oo ever 'card of a nyme like that!" Bates paused in his work. "Nils!" he said. "W'y, it's 'eathen, that's wot

it is! Ain't it, Mac?"

The Scotsman went on hammering.

"Werever joo get 'old of a moniker like that?" Bates spoke now directly to Otto. "Tell you wot I think—I don't think as 'ow it's a nyme at all! Want t'know wot I think—I think as 'ow you ain't reely a Scandanoovian! I think yer a bloody fiver, that's wot I think!"

Nils went on with the job at hand—an intricate piece of dovetailing which necessitated him lying upon his stomach. 'Scandanoovian' had meant nothing to him, and 'fiver' less.

But Bates was warming to his work. "W'y don't you wash them ears, cockie?" He stirred Nils in the ribs with his toe. "Can't you 'ear wot I'm assayin' to yer? I said as 'ow I thought you wasn't a bloody Scandanoovian at all! And w'y did I say that? Because I think as 'ow yer a bloody German, that's wot I think! I think yer a German masqueroodin' as a Swede! I think yer in the fifth bloody column!"

"Och, leave the boy be!" grunted the Scot.

Possibly, had his victim remained impervious, the Cockney might have paid heed. But, on repetition, Otto had grasped 'Scandanoovian.' And the words 'German' and 'fifth column' were plain enough. He was badly startled. He set down the chisel he was using and sat

upright and stared at Bates. He hoped that his face was not betraying him by pallor. Half his mind knew that this was a clumsy, malicious joke—but the other half told him that such jokes can be deadly. He said nothing, wondering what to do.

The Cockney, encouraged by this reaction, rose to histrionic heights. His beady little eyes were cruel and

twinkling. He began to gesticulate. He said:

"Didn't fool me for a minute, you didn't! I knew yer the minute yer set foot aboard; I reckernized yer by the shipe of yer 'ead. 'Oh-oh!' I says to meself, 'A German, eh? Boche, eh? A bleedin' fiver!'"

Otto decided what Nils would do.

"Don' be a dom fooil!" he said, grinning and using his broadest accent.

The Scotsman looked up, studying the pair with lack-lustre interest. "Gin I waur you, London, I'd be leavin' you laddie bide." He spoke quietly, as if it were small matter to him whether his words were heard or not.

They certainly had no effect upon Bates, now playing to a gallery of three deck-hands who had stopped to listen

appreciatively.

"So yer don't like bein' rumbled, eh?" He came a step nearer and stood directly over the half-prostrate Otto. "Don't worry, cockie, they proberly won't shoot yer—they'll jest shove yer in a 'ternment camp f'r about six mumffs—till we've settled 'Itler's 'ash! . . ."

Otto did not look up again—but neither did he continue his work. He was still desperately wondering what to do; striving to make no mistakes with Nils Jorgensen's reactions.

"An' by the bye——" Bates was lashing himself to yet greater efforts—"'Ow was the Fury when you last 'ad haudience with 'im? I mean, before 'e sent you orf on this 'ere job? . . ."

The three deck-hands drew closer, all smiling broadly. The Scotsman, more intently now, watched Nils Jorgensen.

Bates worked swiftly to his climax—an imitation which he had rendered with unvarying success in many fo'c'sles and more bars. "I c'n jest picture the touchin' scene when 'e gives you yer orders. . . ." He had whipped out a little black pocket comb and, while he was speaking, had combed down over his bony forehead a lank streak of dark, greasy hair. "Somethin' like this, it must of bin." He now held the comb' in his left hand with only an inch or so of it visible, and he suddenly pressed this inch to his upper lip, where it showed beneath his nose like a smudge of moustache. As, simultaneously, he thrust out his right hand in the Nazi salute, the resemblance to cartoons and even photographs of Adolf Hitler was undeniably strong. And the harsh, whining shout in which he began to render double-talk German completed a parody of very considerable effect.

"Doss picklehausen!" he bawled. "Ee puddingfelt ei pickhoser!... Voo puddpuller ee kintergarten wass grummiter keifei!..."

The deck-hands clutched each other in an ecstasy of

mirth—and the Scot set down his hammer.

Each muscle in Otto Falken's body was like a coiled spring: Nils Jorgensen was fast fading into the machinemade limbo from which he had sprung. . . .

But Bates—even if he sensed danger—was too much

enamoured of his own performance to stop.

"Dee droonkentramps ee kiesterflogger! . . ." he roared—and broke off with a strange sound which was half

scream, half gurgle.

For the *lèse majesté* was too much for Otto Falken. Incredibly, he came up from the deck and his lying position in one smooth, catlike movement so fast that the eyes of the watchers could barely follow it. And his right hand took Bates by his scrawny throat while the left took iron grip upon the belt around the man's middle. . . .

"Hey!" said the Scot, and scrambled to his feet.

"Ugg!" said Bates—or something like that. He was now above Otto's head, held parallel with the deck at the full stretch of Otto's arms—and very near was a yawning companionway which led down steeply to the second-class saloon. . . .

"Hey, Swede!" shouted the Scot—and began to move. But he was too late. Otto, still with his burden kicking and struggling above his head, took four steps—and flung the burden from him, a weirdly waving mass of arms and legs, down the companionway. . . .

(iii)

There was trouble. There was bound to be, although the wiry Bates escaped with nothing more than a great fright, complete loss of wind and a badly bruised back.

But his story had lost nothing in the telling—and Otto was confined, awaiting appearance before the Captain, to the cramped amidships quarters below 'C' deck which he shared with the Scot and two stewards. He would, on a normal cruise, have been in the brig—but on the *Vulcania* now there was no such thing: like every other inch of available space, it was housing units of the cargo.

Otto sat on the edge of a lower bunk. His elbows were on his knees and his chin was cupped in his hands. He stared unseeingly at his feet and, his heart no higher than his ankles, reviled himself for a headstrong and utterly incompetent fool who was so little fitted for his work that he must betray himself, forsooth, because he could not tolerate the apings of a moronic enemy; apings which were merely malicious chaff. . . .

He seemed to have been endless hours in confinement—but actually only half the middle watch had passed since they put him there. He wondered, hopelessly, when the Captain would see him—and what would happen after that. It seemed inevitable to him, now, that he should be recognized for what he was. . . . He thought of prison-camps, and courts-martial, and firing parties—and the utter unworthiness of Otto Falken. . . .

He wondered why they kept him waiting so long—and thought it must be to break him down. Well, they wouldn't break him down. They could do what they liked

to him, he wouldn't slip again: for what it was worth he would maintain to the end steadfast adherence to the character and self of Nils.

He jumped up and from its corner pulled his duffel bag and undid it and dragged out the battered strong-box. He unlocked this and found the oilskin-covered package of photographs and papers: it could do no harm to have with him the 'proofs' of Nils' identity which the Machine had provided, from birth certificate to the yellowed old snapshots.

He locked the box again and put it back in the duffel bag and slipped the oilskin packet inside his shirt. He began to pace the little cabin: he would not let this waiting break him down, he would think of other things; things which Nils might think of—anything and every-

thing except the fact that he was Otto Falken. . . .

It was weary, uphill work—but he made some sort of showing at last, by asking himself Nils-like questions, then giving the answers. Why, for instance, if England were sending women and children away because things were so bad, did they not properly escort the ships which carried these women and children? And what was a boat bound from Southampton to New York doing in Lisbon, which the Portuguese so foolishly called Lisboa? And why should the voyage from Lisbon to New York be supposed to take eight days upon a ship of this class, when six should be more than enough? And who and what was the English Quartermaster who had got him aboard? . . .

Stop! That was a dangerous question—it couldn't matter to Nils; it would not even occur to Nils! Better just answer the questions asked already. For instance, the *Vulcania* had had an escort for the first day and a half of her voyage; two destroyers which, after that time, had left her and returned to their Channel duties. The *Vulcania* was in Lisbon because of radioed orders concerning submarines which had sent her temporarily out of her course. The *Vulcania* must follow an unusual course which would take her much longer than a direct one would. And the English Quartermaster—whether or no a servant

of the Machine-obviously could not be approached for

help. . . .

There they were again—Otto Falken's thoughts! It was no use—he couldn't keep them out. He ceased pacing and sat down again upon the edge of the bunk and once more dropped his head into his hands: he was alone; he had failed; he was utterly miserable.

Then, in the darkest moment, came the Idea!

Otto raised his head and let fall the hands which had supported it: the corners of his mouth began slowly to curl upwards, and little radiating creases showed at the corners of the steel-blue eyes.

He sat motionless for a few moments; then, very slowly and with the smile now broad upon his face, fetched the

oilskin packet from inside his shirt.

He took out the photographs and sorted them carefully and at last found what he wanted. It was one of the newest-looking snapshots: it had mountains in the immediate background, and showed an untidy heap of black, smoking ruins which could be recognized as the remains of a sprawling, one-storeyed house.

This, with another which showed the original of the ruins against the same background and with a man and woman standing in the doorway, he put carefully into his

wallet.

He swung his legs up on to the bunk and lay down, his hands clasped behind his head and the smile still lurking in his eyes.

(iv)

Captain Reynolds of the *Vulcania*, having seen the door close behind his Second Officer and a carpenter's mate named Nils Jorgensen, rang for his steward and sent him for Mr. Brody.

Mr. Brody, the best First Officer Reynolds had ever had, was with him quickly. Mr. Brody accepted a drink and a chair and wondered what was coming.

"That Swede," said Reynolds. "Carpenter's mate. Namee of Jorgensen. Big, tall, blond boy."

"Oh, yes," said Brody. "Some fight or something,

wasn't there? Briggs mentioned it."

The Captain chuckled, crossing his hands over a capacious belly. "Threw a feller down a companion. Cockney feller—Bates. Not hurt much; badly scared."

Brody knew when to interpolate. "Yes?" he said.

"Want you to keep an eye on Jorgensen. See the men don't rag him too much. Pass the word to Briggs."

"Yes?" said Brody.

The Captain took two sips at his drink and set his glass down. "Feller Bates was baiting the boy. Accused him of being in the fifth column." He chuckled again richly. "Jorgensen couldn't take it—threw him down companion."

"Yes?" said Brody.

"Point," said Captain Reynolds. "Boy hates Nazis! So much he can't be chaffed. Careful or he'll kill someone.

Wonderful specimen."

"Very sad!" The Captain took another sip from his drink and shook his head gravely. "Boy's got good reason to hate the Boche. Parents lived in Norway. Narvik region. Boche blew 'em to Hell. Only few months ago. Bad time to bait the lad. Fix it, will you?"
"Oh, I see, sir!" Brody stood up. "Yes, sir. Can do."

5 ATLANTIC:

Second Phase

THE weather had been fair since they left Lisbon—but as evening fell, the wind changed and there were ugly squalls. The sky grew rapidly overcast and a heavy swell began.

Reynolds himself came out upon the bridge and conferred with the Navigation Officer and altered his course half a point. There was some distress among the

passengers, but nothing untoward.

By night the sky was a solid sheet of lowering black velvet without a star visible. The wind came steadily now from the south-west and was mounting towards gale proportions. The *Vulcania* rolled and wallowed and pitched—but ploughed on through the sea at three-quarter speed. . . .

A mile away, on her port bow, something shimmered beneath the curiously still surface of a valley between two rollers. It was grey and glistening as its back heaved above the water and bore without flinching the smashing

brunt of a breaking wave. . . .

More of its back showed—a sleek, steel length. Its nose veered—until it was in line with the distant, unheeding *Vulcania*. It gathered speed and cut through the swelling waves at an angle which very soon, at this pace, would bring it close enough to its prey. . . .

(ii)

Hearts aboard the *Vulcania* grew lighter: to the delight of Captain Reynolds and the immeasurable relief of the

human cargo, there came a quick lull in the heavy weather. The sea, though running a heavy swell, was no longer mountainous. The wind lessened many degrees, and the sky, though still overcast, was less ominous. And then the first shell struck.

It was said afterwards that the *Vulcania* had no detector apparatus, or alternatively that she had but it was out of order. For some reason, the real truth about this has never emerged—but, whichever way it was, it is certain that the submarine's presence was utterly unknown until that first shell, which struck amidships and high, landing with a downward trajectory at the very base of the foremost

funnel, immediately aft of the bridge. . . .

The terror inspired by shelling is far greater than that caused by a torpedo. The torpedo, oil-smooth and silent and subterranean, strikes where it cannot be seen, below the waterline. Even the sound and shock of its explosion is dulled by depth. But a shell—albeit only from a sixinch gun—smashes from the outside; smashes down, probably, spreading visible and pressing havoc and often, as in the case of the Vulcania now, leaves an immediate wake of dead and smashed and wounded, dreadful enough upon an ordinary merchantman, or even a fighting ship, but inconceivably terrible upon a craft loaded to the gunwales with a living freight of women and children. . . .

(iii)

The leading funnel sagged, swayed and came crashing down with an unearthly groaning louder and more terrifying than the explosion itself. The great mass of metal carried away the after-half of the bridge and then, its fall accelerated. tore a gaping breach through two decks and crashed down into what had once been the First-Class Saloon but was now a dormitory for sixty mothers and their offspring. . . .

The noise was indescribable: in one tremendous

instant, complete peace and such silence as the sea affords had been violently transmuted, in shocking gradations which swelled incredibly with each component, into a bedlamite inferno of sound. First, tearing a jagged hole in serenity, had come the sharp, heavy report of the gun . . . then, almost simultaneously, the rending roar of the shell's explosion—a terrifying sound, which mingled indistinguishably with the shuddering *feel* of the ship trembling violently like a giant horse shaking itself beneath one. . . .

And then, swelling discordantly into a demoniac, unbelievable chorus, came the other sounds—cracking and crashing of wood . . . creaking and groaning of iron . . . the ourobboros-hiss of escaping steam . . . the thudding, tortured smashing of timber beneath iconoclastic weight . . . the crackling of shivered glass . . . the antlike, futile shouting of men thrusting improbably through the whole enveloping roar. . . .

Then, for one instant, a sudden cessation of the great noises—and, as a dreadful echo to them, the thin, sharp cries of children. . . .

Then the second shell came. The submarine's gunner was in form: it landed within two feet of the first and, consequently, dropped two decks before it struck and exploded—this time right in the saloon-dormitory. It blasted a downward breach through which its quick successor fell almost plumb—to explode in the engineroom itself. . . .

All the din-demons were loose now; but the demon of steam raised his cry above all the others—and the *Vulcania* wallowed to a standstill and swung helpless and rose and dropped with the slow heavy swell of the sea while, a bare six hundred land-yards away, the gunner whose eye was in kept up his target practice.

In fifteen minutes the four hundred and fifty-three items of quick human freight aboard the *Vulcania* had been reduced by the considerable number of eighty-four. And of the remaining three hundred and sixty-nine, many were twitching, reddened lumps of uselessness. . . .

(iv)

"Lieber Gott!" said Otto beneath his breath—and staggered and fell as a bulkhead bulged out in his path and split suddenly and fell.

A baulk of timber fell upon his back as he tripped over debris. His spine was saved by the thick cork of the lifebelt which he wore—but he was knocked flat and all the breath was driven from his body and his face was smashed into the litter.

His forehead struck painfully as he fell. He writhed and struggled, his emptied lungs seeming to resist his whistling efforts to refill them. . . . His head swam and blood ran stickily from his nostrils. . . .

He could breathe again. But his vision was hazy and his head rang with the infernal chorus of noises. He pulled himself somehow to his feet and staggered on. He was making his way along the main port gangway on B deck. He had to find an unobstructed companion which would allow him to descend. He had to get to his quarters—and the duffel bag and the box which was inside it, for he had to have—he must have—the oilskin packet. After all, there was a chance that some would be saved, and he might be among them. It was his duty to be among them if he could—and if he were, it was also his duty to be able to keep up the character of Nils. . . .

There was an agonizing lull in the fury of sound and movement which had been shaking the ship. Nils, his head swimming, moved faster. He could see the companionway now, ahead of him, where the gangway ended—and he could see that, although debris strewed the space before it, the companion itself was clear.

He staggered as another shell struck the ship, this time further aft: the gunner must have been traversing now, and doing a very thorough job.

Otto did not fall this time—but from the last cabin—immediately ahead of him—came a high-pitched, vibrating

crackle of tortured wood and metal, loud enough and near enough to be vivid through the other, greater noises. It was followed at once by a sort of slithering crash—and the door of the cabin, torn from hinges and fastenings, fell outwards across his path. He jumped back—and then was hurled from his feet as a bathtub slid through the open, splintered doorway and caught his legs and thrust them from underneath him.

He shook his head to clear it, and pulled himself upright, his hands upon the edge of the tub. The Vulcania, now momentarily beam-on to the swelling seas, rolled heavily—and Otto, his head reeling, slipped and

almost tell again.

He thrust his hands down to save himself—and they lighted on something within the tub; something which half-floated in tepid water and was clammily warm to the touch. He caught at the edge of the tub and reared upright and found himself staring down at the body of a woman. It was a young body, and by no means without beauty. It lay upon its back in an attitude astonishingly lifelike; indeed, Otto thought that she was alive, until he saw the jagged piece of incongruously shining metal—some part, no doubt, of a toilet fitting—which stuck rigidly out from the dark hole where one of her eyes had been.

(v)

Above there was indescribable chaos—and incredible discipline. Upon the already tilting decks, as near to their allotted boat stations as they were allowed to go, were miraculously orderly groups of women and children. Two boats, full-laden, were down and afloat already, and pulling away to the starboard for safety. Another, full, was being lowered from its davits when a shell fragment tore the right arm from a member of the lowering crew and the sheet screamed over its blocks and the boat tilted nose down in mid-air, and little, sprawling, armed and legged specks fell from it and hurtled down to the grey water.

The gunner fired again—and a flickering dart of flame sprang up from the *Vulcania* and licked a purple tongue at the cold dark sky. . . .

(vi)

Otto had reached his quarters. The oilskin packet was safe in an inner pocket, and he was trying to make his way above decks again.

It had been a difficult journey down: to get up again was even harder. The *Vulcania* was listing badly to port, and the shells continued to drop. Worse by far, there was fire somewhere. The heat was growing oppressive and in Otto's nostrils was the acrid smell of melting metal.

The companion down which he had come was irretrievably blocked. So was the next, which was the sternmost—so that he was forced to retrace his steps and desperately try his luck amidships. Clambering over debris, fighting against the shuddering and rolling of the ship, choking with the acrid, almost invisible smoke which was now tearing at his lungs, he fought his way along. He found a companion which was clear as far up as B deck, but thereafter was impassable. He worked forward again, clambered over the worst pile of debris he had yet happened upon—and saw the first fellow-human he had met on this nightmare journey.

It was a dark-haired, squarely built boy of ten. He was clad in life-belt, pyjamas and a brown woolly bath-robe—and he was working with all his strength to clear from the doorway of a cabin the jammed wreckage of the opposite bulkhead. He was silent and self-possessed and extremely busy. He was doubled over, with his arms around the main timber which was jamming the rest. He turned a contorted face up to Otto, but did not relax his effort. He said:

"I say, could you help me get this stuff away?" His accent was precise but his voice was thickened by the strain.

He jerked his head towards the cabin door. "My mother's in there," he said.

Immediately he had spoken he turned back to his task again, heaving and straining until it seemed that the muscles must tear in his sturdy small back. For him it was certain that, having been asked, this man would help him.

And, curiously, that was the way too in which it struck Otto. It is perhaps to his discredit that there was no struggle in his mind between duty and humanity; but the question of whether Nils Jorgensen should or should not delay his search for safety did not so much as pose itself in his mind. He stood beside the boy and ran his eye over the tangled web of splintered lath and timber and bent down to see what must be done to clear it quickly.

There was a strange silence now; the lull since the striking of the last shell was much longer than its predecessors. The *Vulcania* wallowed unevenly, and the heat

and the sharp smell of burning were fiercer.

Otto saw that the boy was right in what he was trying so stoutly to do—and stooped beside the little figure and wrapped his arms about the same baulk with which it was

struggling and lent all his strength.

At first it did not seem enough. The blood sang in his head as he called upon his body for more force, and yet more. From the other side of the bulkhead—from inside the cabin—he could hear a woman's voice. It was saying the same words, over and over again. "Derek!" it was saying. "Derek: go up on deck—at once! Go to our boat-station. . . . Do you hear me, Derek! . . ."

Otto called upon final and hidden reserves. There was a tearing crackle in the web—and the main prop of the obstacle came slowly down, bringing with it a shower of lesser, broken pieces of shattered wood and twisted scraps of metal.

The boy fell, but was on his feet again in an instant. There was a dull red bruise across his forehead, and from a jagged scratch on his forehead ran a thin trickle of blood. But a way was clear to the door and he darted at it and tugged it open. Subconsciously, Otto noticed that the hands

which did the tugging left a wet red smear upon the bright brass of the handle.

A woman stood upon the other side of the threshold. She was young and tall and her hair hung down almost to her waist over the robe of blue silk which covered her. She put arms about the small figure and tried to pull it to her, patting at the clumsy cork of the life-belt with unsteady hands and then in horror looking at the long ugly scratch upon the forehead. She seemed to be saying something—but her son would have none of it. He pulled free of her arms and tugged at the blue robe and was sternly practical. He said:

"Come on, Mother! Hurry!" He suddenly pulled further away from her, eyeing here severely. "Where's your life-belt?" He went past her into the cabin,

searching.

Then the torpedo struck. Why the U-boat commander should so suddenly and extravagantly have abandoned the hitherto efficacious gunnery in favour of the absolutely sure but infinitely more expensive torpedo, will always be an unanswerable question except to the man himself, particularly as the *Vulcania* was already doomed. Battered, helpless, sinking and after as she was, it is impossible to do more than guess at the motivation for the extra blow. Perhaps the commander thought that help was coming to her, by aeroplane or destroyer; perhaps he was carried away by the completeness of his hollow victory; perhaps it was a subordinate's mistake. There is an answer, there must be—but whatever it is, the fact remains that the torpedo was fired and did strike.

It struck the *Vulcania's* unprotected hull squarely amidships, on the port side; the side to which she was already listing. There was a different sound then as it exploded—a muffled, rending, *underneath* sort of sound at once duller and larger than the other sounds of bombardment had been and the more instantly terrible by reason of the invisibility of the damage.

The ship staggered: that is the only word. And almost at once her list sharply increased. The boy fell, and the

woman. Otto lurched, and was brought up sharply by the damaged bulkhead on the other side of the gangway.

He pushed himself erect. The clumsy life-belt twisted on his body and beneath it, in its inner pocket, the oilskin package thrust a suddenly sharp edge into his ribs and thence his mind: Nils Jorgensen's place was above-decks, seeking a boat.

"Come!" said Otto Falken to the woman, and pulled

her to her feet.

The boy scrambled up. He still stared about the cabin. "Her life-belt," he said. "Her life-belt."

"Come now—quick!" said Otto—and saw that they were following him and made slow, staggering progress along the gangway which with every more dreadful moment tilted yet further, in a series of shaking, wallowing jerks, until they were forced, almost, to walk along the portside bulkhead as if it were floor instead of wall. He heard a muffled cry from behind him, and turned and saw that the woman had fallen, her foot caught in a jagged-edged breach. The small, square figure of her son was bending over her, trying to pull her up, at first using only one hand while he carried the other awkwardly at its side; then, as Otto moved to help, using this one too he winced with a little hiss of indrawn breath, as he did so.

Otto picked up the woman. "Hold to me," he said and thrust her ingers into his belt. He took the boy by the shoulder. "You go front," he said. "In front." As he spoke, he lifted the small hand which had caused the wincing. He did it quickly, turning it palm-up before its owner was aware of the action. There were ragged red cuts across it and, through the largest, bone shone whitely.

The boy closed his fingers quickly, glaring up at Otto with a frown.

Otto said: "Go now. In front. Quick!"

The child went—and they staggered on and came to the end of the gangway and a blast of heat so intense that they reeled back. The fire was playing freakish tricks, as fire on shipboard will, and now it was coming down at them.

The companion above was a flame-filled mouth, cutting off

all possibility of gaining the deck.

Otto thought furiously. The woman still clung to his belt, and the boy stood close—but neither made useless sound or movement. The ship moved again underneath them, settling down yet further in another shuddering roll, the angle of her list yet more acute.

The boy was looking at the downward companionway, where there was no wreckage and as yet no flame. Deep lines creased his smooth for chead in a frown of concentrated

thought.

Otto said: "Come now. Back. To try there. Quick!" He had made up his mind: there was remote possibility—very remote—that before the ship turned full turtle they could find a clear way to the decks further aft.

He turned and the woman followed, obedient. But the boy put out his sound hand and caught at Otto's shirt

sleeve. He said:

"Those big doors in the side." He pointed at the clear companionway. "Down lower. I saw them at Southampton. They brought things into the ship through them—and some people."

Otto stared as the precise, clipped words in the clear voice sank into his mind. The cargo-ports! It was a chance; a better chance, perhaps, than any other. . . .

(vii)

The Atlantic swelled restlessly, with a thick heavy swell, under the dark sky. The *Vulcania's* carcass, battered and smoking and shamefully, dreadfully helpless, lolloped crazily to the tune of the sullen water. She was almost directly upon her side now, her port rail nearly awash, and she was more down by the stern than the bow, so that there was not even dignity left to her in death.

Away from her—clear away to port—were four little bobbing specks, all that remained of her boats. Nowhere

else was there sign of any other craft. 'The crowded cargoes of the boats could not see her any longer—the distance was too great and the darkness too dense.

So that none saw the three figures which clambered through the open leaf of the cargo-port in her starboard side which now was uppermost of her bulk, where the decks should have been; none saw the largest figure lift in turn the other two and throw them downwards into the heaving, dark water and then itself plunge after them. . . .

(viii)

Otto's lungs were stretched almost to bursting point. But he must keep his head up—and fill the lungs through his nose! He told himself this in time with his kicking legs—" $Den \dots mund \dots zuhalten!$ Den $\dots mund \dots zuhalten!$ "

His body felt numb and heavy—and, very curiously considering the frightful coldness of the water, very warm. But his arms were neither hot nor cold—they just hurt him. Hurt him impossibly, unbelievably. His left arm was the worse. It was around the woman, under her shoulders: it kept her head above the water and was perpetually shot through and through with stabbing, cramping pains which would have been more bearable had their occurrence been in definite rhythm and not, as it was, in torturing haphazardness.

His right arm was bad, too. But not so bad as the other unless he *thought* about it. It had the relief of alternate duty: now it would help in the half-swimming, half-treading movement with which he kept his own and the woman's head above water; now it would reach out and pluck at the boy and force up his drooping head.

The sea was an irregular relief map of shifting, swelling hills and valleys. It was bitterly, satanically cold, with an oily, all-embracing coldness, and it stretched down beneath Otto to unimaginable depths of cruelty. Overhead was the

dark and lowering and inimical sky, with black cloud masses racing across a blacker backcloth which blotted out moon and stars, and upon the rest of the heaving surface of the sea was nothing save these three dark and minute and bobbing specks.

The strange, warm numbness began to spread to Otto's mind. He ceased to think—and for long intervals now he would not even feel the pain in his arms, yet some inner force kept them and his legs and body at their work. . . .

They were deep in a valley between the tireless, forever advancing hills of water when a voice jerked him back to agonized awareness. It was a faint, far-away voice which he had never heard before, but which came nevertheless from the head against his right shoulder. It said something which Otto did not catch, but the quality of the tone made him increase the action of his legs so that he could use his right hand to make sure that the boy's grip upon him was not loosening and then to seize the small neck and jerk the head upright, clear of the water.

The voice came again. It was very loud this time, and had that super-normal naturalness and clarity which tells that the speaker is not conscious of speaking. It was a high,

enthusiastic voice, and it was telling a story.

"Listen, you chaps!" it said—and went on to gabble so fast that the words did not separate themselves in Otto's mind, accompanied and enwrapped as they were in a sort of running giggle of excitement.

". . . and there it was—a German sub!" it said with

sudden definition. "Golly! . . ."

Then the next hill swooped down upon them and toyed with them and failed to crush them and swooped them up to its crest, as Otto fought with it, and slid them down into yet another valley which was a dreadful counterpart of all the others.

And the weight upon Otto's right arm was suddenly heavier.

(ix)

The wind lessened and the sky grew less black and the swell subsided, gradually, to a near-flat calm. But it was a cold grey dawn—and the look-out man in the crow's nest of the *Admiral Farragut* shivered beneath his layers of clothing.

The Admiral Farragut was a tanker, and she flew the U.S. Ensign and also had the flag painted large upon both beams. But in these days one never knew: hence the lookout duty, shared in turn by every one of the crew throughout every hour of every voyage.

The man shive ed again, and thrust his hands deeper into his pockets. His gaze swept the level dead-grey surface of the Atlantic in a wide sweeping arc. . . .

His hands came out of his pockets. He stiflened. His eye had been caught by something at the outermost edge of the arc. He stared, first with his naked eye, then through a glass—and after that he shouted. . . .

They could not separate the three until a boat had picked them up and they had been hauled aboard. Otto, as willing hands had caught at him and his burdens, had lost his last, slipping grip upon consciousness, and they had been forced to pry his fingers loose from the life-belt of the child. Also, the Second Officer, who was in charge of the boat, had to cut the woman's long hair with his sheath-knife. The hair had been divided into two main strands, and these, roughly twisted, had been tied around Otto's neck so that the unconscious head of the woman had been immovably lashed to him, its chin resting upon his shoulder.

(x)

Something forced Otto's teeth apart and there was a trickling of liquid flame down his throat. He choked and

opened his eyes and looked up at the faces of unfamiliar men and shut off sight again. . . .

He waked three hours later and rolled over on his back

and thought, 'Where am I?'

He thought it in German—but before the words came out of his mouth he had regained sufficient control of himself to turn them into inarticulate sound: he did not know why he did this, but merely that he must.

A lean, unshaven face swam into his vision and looked down at him and grinned with a flash of improbably white

teeth.

"How's it goin', pal?" said a deep, metallic voice.

Memory, though battered and hole-pocked, flooded Otto's mind. He said, carefully:

"All right. . . . What ship?"

The stubbled face leaned closer. "A'miral Farragut. Tanker—U.S. Merchant Marine." Then, painstakingly: "United States."

"Oh . . ." said Otto—and then:

"The . . . the . . ." He was groping for a word. "The child—the boy?"

The long unshaven face moved from side to side as the

head was shaken.

"No use t' fool ya, Bud. . . . The kid didn't make it." Idiom was clarified again. "Too bad—but he was dead when we hauled you in."

The word dead came clearly through the mists. Otto stared up into small eyes which were nearly the same colour

as his own. He did not speak.

"Girl's O.K., though," said the voice. "All right!

. . . She's sleepin'.

"Oh . . ." said Otto—and closed his eyes once more. He said, when he opened them again:

"Where is the ship going?"

"The good old U.S., son." The face had gone, but the voice was still there. "Noo York!"

6 NEW YORK:

First Phase

 ${f T}_{ ext{HL}}$ sky was light, clear blue and very high up, and a bright sun shone out of it and the air was extraordinarily clear; so Glear that a man could see not only a great distance but so sharply as to lend everything a most disturbing unreality. And with this clarity of atmosphere and vision there went an accompanying clarity of sound which enhanced the feeling of fantasy. The steely water of the harbour was illusion, and the faint movement of the Admiral Farragut must be caused by men behind the scenes. Across the celluloid water, and behind the grey quays (which must be of lath and canvas), huge sharp-edged castles of cardboard reared up to impossible heights, and from the direction of their hidden feet came a vast humming, more palpable perhaps than audible, which must be some ingenious device for producing the illusion that the unbelievable backcloth was indeed a great and busy city.

Otto had seen the panoramics first just after dawn, when the Admiral Farragut had come to rest in the harbour. He was fascinated, like a child at a circus, and he stayed by the rail, rapt, even when the launches came. They seemed so much part of the theatrical set piece that he paid them scant attention—until their passengers surged aboard and he found himself surrounded by mummers who engulfed him, trying, he felt, to drag him into the play itself.

He was bewildered—until it slowly dawned upon him that these were reporters and that Nils Jorgensen, through some strange caprice of destiny, was the current American hero. This in itself was again puzzling—and remained so until. much later, he discovered that the wireless operator of the Farragut was a youth of journalistic leanings, whose impassioned descriptions of the rescue had struck New York as the only available human story (and what a story!) about the tragedy of the Vulcania.

The newspapermen surrounded Otto and stared at him and pumped his hand up and down and pointed cameras at him and asked questions, all talking at once. And then they did all the same things over again with the Captain and the Second Officer and the men who had manned the lifeboat-but Otto could not get away, because they included him in everything-and all the time they took pictures and more pictures; pictures of Otto alone, of Otto shaking hands with the Captain, of Otto surrounded by the lifeboat's crew, of Otto and the Second Officer. . . .

Then, imperceptibly at first but quickly swelling to a torrent, came more launches and the other visitors—and Otto was caught in their toils before he knew that the ordeal by Third Estate was past. Now there were women; twenty or thirty, he thought dimly, though there were only seven in fact. And there was a tall, white-haired man, who spoke to him in Swedish for a moment and was then thrust aside to make way for yet another group, consisting of a young man, an elderly cleric, and a girl.

Otto allowed his aching hand to be pumped again and muttered uncomfortably and could not understand very much of what they all said. He shot glances this way and that, hopelessly seeking the escape which he knew was

impossible.

And then, with a sudden magic, the group about him melted and was no more, and he was faced by a single

person; a woman very different from the rest.

She was tall and heroically built and remarkable. Smoothly dressed hair of beautiful grey-white, almost bluish in tint, framed an arresting, ageless face beneath a hat both becoming and unridiculous. She might have been thirty or ten years more. She did not seize Otto's hand. She did not gasp and bubble at him, nor did she remain

silent and gaze round-eyed. She smiled; a handsome, friendly, only faintly unnatural smile which showed beautiful teeth between full lips not over-red. And she spoke neither loudly and too fast as if he were accustomed only to English, nor slowly and with that over-carefulness which placed him upon the mental level of charity-child or orangoutang; she spoke as if to an ordinary fellow human. She said:

"Poor man! You must be sick and tired of all this!"
Otto, though with not such hopelessness as he had to the others, made ubble-bubbling noises of politeness.

"Yes, yes!" she said. "Never mind. . . . I'll help

you to escape—if you promise me something."

"Promise?" said Otto slowly.

"You poor boy! . . ." She came a little nearer to him. "My name is Van Teller—Mrs. Theodore Van Teller. I am interested in organizing Benefits for the Allied Causes."

Otto was puzzled. "Benefits?" he said carefully. He

did not want this woman to leave him.

She laughed—a studied but exciting sound. She said:

"I mean obtaining money for the Allies—for the various needs of England, and Greece, and China; for all the countries"—her voice was suddenly hard and sharpedged—"who are fighting the monster of Nazism. . . ."

She caught herself up and laughed again, apologetically.

She said, while Otto stared at her:

"I didn't mean to be melodramatic. . . . This is what you must promise me. This week, I am putting on an entertainment in aid of the Greek people. I want you to promise me that you will appear there—with me—and speak to the audience. . . ."

(ii)

Otto sat upon the edge of his bunk. True to her word, Mrs., Van Teller had aided his escape from the crowded deck. She had drawn him aside as if in talk and he had

found himself near a companionway and she had suddenly thrust him towards it and he had run down, with a fleeting impression of her shapely back blocking the narrow way behind him. . . .

He sat with his head in his hands—and his tired mind, given free play for once, became a turgid maelstrom of unrelated memories and impressions and demi-

thoughts. . . .

The boy was a good boy, a fine boy—it was a pity the boy was dead: if one had had to die, it should have been the mother. His shoulder hurt, worse than it had yesterday. He was hungry—he'd been on deck and missed breakfast. Why had that fool U-boat commander chosen the Vulcania? That was the sort of thing which gave these damned English propagandists their chance. He was thirsty, but not for water: he wanted alcohol; alcohol which was raw and burning and hurt his throat and stomach and opened flowers of flame in his head. That woman outside the terraced restaurant in Stockholm! The Fuehrer's quick, nervous hand-grip! The sea had been cold; colder than he had believed anything could be cold! And that hair had hurt his neck. Maybe the strain on his neck had started the pain in his shoulder. Those fat, bursting sausages that Axel's wife would cook every morning. The quiet, murmuring voice of the priest with the pencil, and Gertrud's breasts, taut and trembling under her cotton frock, and the white bone showing through the red-edged gashes in the boy's hand, and the cold hate in the eyes of the French girl before she had spat into his face, and the booming voice of the Artillery man, Hegger, and the prison-camp in England, and the two men in the wood, and the strange feel of the Spitfire's stick, and the two Hurricanes wig-wagging up to him over the Channel. . . . And then the coldness of the sea again, and the pain in his shoulder. He wondered how the mother was—still prostrated, probably, or those newspapermen would not have been kept from her. He supposed he'd have to see her again, before they took her on shore—or perhaps he could write her a little letter; then he wouldn't have to see her. . . .

He sat upright suddenly. The thought of writing had brought back the memory that he had lost his pencil with the wooden top, and thought of the pencil brought him sharply to consideration of his predicament. The sinking of the *Vulcania*, which could not possibly have been foreseen, must have disrupted the plans of the Machine for him: what would happen now? What steps, if any, should he take himself? How long must he remain purely Nils Jorgensen, a shipless, homeless and selfless Swedish sailor? What . . .

There came a sharp little rapping at the door of the

cabin, and he started.

"Who is there?" he said. He stood up and went to the

door, and opened it.

A man stepped past him into the cabin; a lanky, stoop-shouldered person who wore, incongruously with the sunshine above, a worn and grease-stained raincoat. On his head, with its brim pulled down upon the bridge of a long and bulbous nose, was a maculate felt hat of more age than worth. From the thin-lipped mouth beneath it came a deep, grating voice.

'Nils Jorgensen!" it said, more as statement than

question. "I'm Karl Etter."

Otto studied the man without speaking: he felt a sudden and comforting certainty that Mr. Etter was more than he seemed to this American world.

"Sit down!" Etter took him by the arm and pushed

him back upon the bunk and sat beside him.

"I'm a journalist," said Etter. "But not like those others on deck. They're just men from the dailies." He thrust the battered hat to the back of his head, and from beneath a high and bulging forehead, two small bright eyes, glittering darkly, sent roving glances over Otto's face. "You understand English all right?"

Otto smiled. "Yes, quite," he said. "But not too fast,

please. And not . . . not . . . "

"Not too much slang?" Etter was very quick. "All right." He pulled out a packet of cigarettes and pressed one upon Otto and took one himself and lighted them both. He talked all the time he was doing this, and after.

"I'm on a weekly paper,' he said. His words came rapidly but very clear and Otto had no difficulty with them. "Called Kosmo. You've probably seen it—lot of pictures; one editorial; one main article called Personality of the Week! We've done Goering and Churchill and Wilkie and John L. Lewis and Mussolini and Lunt and Henry Armstrong. Catholic, you ce. I want to do you. It's supposed to be a great honour—and it's worth a grand to you—a thousand dollars. Wouldn't object to a thousand dollars, would you?"

Otto smiled again. "No objection," he said—and thought how truly wonderful was the Machine in its speed of working and its camouflage of the working parts. He wondered now what steps would be taken to gain him

proper entrance to America.

Etter might have been reading his mind.

"I was talking to the Swedish Consul," said Etter. "He spoke to you up on deck. He told me he was getting you temporary permission to land. Like ordinary shore leave. But he's also going to work to get you an immigration quota number—if you want one. . . That's permission to live in this country—they call it being a resident alien. It's next door to being a citizen—except you can't vote and you do pay income tax. Like that, wouldn't you?"

"Oh," said Otto slowly. "Oh—I understand. . . ."

"Great guy, the Consul!" said Etter. "Good friend of mine."

"Yes?" said Otto. "Yes. I should like to be . . . what did you say? . . . a resident alien. And live in this country. Yes."

"Fine!" Etter gave approval. "So if you like that—well, you won't mind giving me a break, huh?"

Otto stared. "Pardon?" It was the first time he had not understood.

Etter laughed—a harsh, creaking sound. "Sorry. I mean, if that arrangement's all right for you, you shouldn't object to giving me that Personality of the Week deal? Huh?"

"Oh," said Otto. "I see. . . . No-of course I will

certainly do that." He spoke even more slowly than before

—but he was thinking fast.

"Fine!" said Etter. "Swell. Thanks." He pulled a wallet from his pocket, and a folded paper from the wallet. He said:

"There's one thing, though." He was unfolding the paper. "You have to promise me you won't give any other interviews until the Kosmo Personality's out. Understand that? It's only fair."

"Yes," Otto said. "Yes. I understand."

Etter slapped him on the shoulder and held out the paper. "Swell!" he said. "Just sign this, will you. It's a simple form of contract—exclusive rights on your lifestory and experiences—all that sort of thing. Better read it."

Otto took the paper. Painstakingly, he read the first lines, and saw that the document was what it had been said to be. He smiled at Etter. He said:

"All right. . . . I will sign. Thank you."

Etter stood up, groping in his pockets and looking down at Otto.

"Got a pen?" said Etter.

Otto shook his head. "I had a pencil," he said slowly. "But it was lost—in the sea."

Etter seemed to be looking at him very hard—but before he could speak there came the sound of voices outside the door and it opened to admit the Captain, neat and burly in spotless, clumsy shore-going clothes, and the tall, distinguished figure of the man who had spoken to Otto in Swedish.

"Hi, Consul!" said Etter. "Got a pen?... Hi thère, Captain."

(iii)

It was only noon when they took Otto ashore—but it was not until after nine that night that he was stationary and alone.

He was in a small, bright room which, with its fellows,

was perched against all credibility four hundred feet above the ground. Everything around him was actual and utile and pleasing to the senses, but these qualities seemed merely to enhance the all-embracing feeling of unreality which had possessed him ever since the Admiral Farragut had dropped anchor in the harbour.

There was a big easy chair by the bay window. wanted to switch off the lights and drop into it and stare unseeingly at the clear, star-crusted sky without looking at the incredible carpet of lights below. He wanted to do this because he thought it the best, the only, way in which he

might-sort out his thoughts.

But there was something he must do first; something he should have done much earlier than this; something he would have done much earlier than this had he been for one moment alone.

He pulled curtains and made sure that the door to the hallway was locked, and walked over to the bed which they had shown him how to pull out of its ingenious hidingplace in the wall. There was a mass of packages on the bed, of all shapes and colours and sizes, the fruits of the twohour shopping trip upon which the little, bespectacled assistant of the Consul had taken him. He rifled among the parcels until he found what he wanted—a small affair of cheaper appearance than the others.

He ripped it open and brought to light a penknife and a small black and chromium propelling pencil. He was very busy then for fifteen minutes-after which time he was repossessed of the only important thing which the sinking of the Vulcania had cost him, a cheap and entirely unremarkable mechanical pencil whose missing top had

been replaced by a whittled piece of wood. .

He looked at the chair by the window—but then he looked at the bed, and after a moment went over to it and swept all the packages to the floor and began to rip off his clothes.

In three minutes the lights were out and he was between the covers and deep in the sleep of exhaustion.

7 NEW YORK:

Second Phase

"And that," said Nils Jorgensen carefully, "is all that I can tell you." He tried not to fix his gaze upon any one face in the hundreds turned up to him. He had been warned against this—not only by Mrs. Van Teller but also by a plump, harassed stage manager and several other well-meaning persons connected in various ways with this expensive hodge-podge of (he thought) inordinately dull 'entertainment' whose obviously considerable cash proceeds were for 'Greek Relief,' whatever exactly this ambiguous phrase might mean.

"I would like now very much," said Nils Jorgensen, coming to the peroration upon which he had worked so carefully and which had so much delighted Mrs. Van Teller, "to say to all 'thank you for the way you have listened'—and to express much and high appreciation of this wonderful country: it is truly a free land of free

people."

He stood straight—almost but not quite at military attention. He bowed with a little, stiff movement which should have been ungraceful but somehow was not. In the discreet but revealing limelight he was pleasing to the eye—tall and lean and wide-shouldered in the new dark clothes which were good but not too good; blond and hard and clean, with deep shadows under the high cheekbones lending a touch almost of asceticism to the frankly Nordic face; slightly constrained and awkward in manner, but saved from gaucherie by simplicity and self-respect.

He walked off the stage to a rolling wave of applause which amazed him by its volume. He smiled inside, with a curling of mental lip: what easily deluded sheep were these, fat and soft and sterile in their self-complacency!

Mrs. Van Teller herself was waiting in the wings. The applause rolled on, undiminished by his disappearance. He stood close to Mrs. Van Teller and found both his hands in hers. A curious little shock travelled up his arms, and he became aware of her perfume and the extraordinary texture of her skin, cool and thick and firm, and alive, he thought, as no other skin he had ever touched; alive as if a current flowed beneath it of some unknown, uncharted potency.

"Nils!" she said. "You were wonderful!" She still held his hands. "Wonderful!" She was tall and straight and magnificent in the gown of black velvet, and against its soft sombreness the marble sheen of her shoulders was

dazzling.

"Listen!" she said—and he heard that still the applause went on. She released his hands. "You must go back," she said. "They want to see you again." She pushed at his shoulders. "Go back! You needn't say anything. Bow!"

Otto turned towards the wings again.

"And Nils!" came an imperious whisper. "Smile at them!"

Otto marched out on to the stage and the spotlight picked him up and held on him. He made his stiff little bow again—and this time, as he straightened, he smiled.

The applause was redoubled as he left the stage, even continuing for several unrequited moments. . . .

(ii)

There was a party after the performance, and the great Van Teller mansion on Park Avenue, unopened during the last years of the banker's life but recently used again by his widow, overflowed with guests. All New York was there, said the papers, meaning three hundred men in dress clothes and perhaps more women. There were much gabble, a little unobtrusive music, a quantity of strong drink—and yet more profit for the admirable Cause.

Otto wandered uncomfortably from one vast, crowded room to another. He was tired and worried and uncomfortable. He felt, although he sneered at himself for so feeling, embarrassed by the lionization he had received and acutely, ridiculously self-conscious of the special sort of prominence he was achieving visually by being in ordinary clothes. He seemed forever to be slipping out of Nils Jorgensen's way of thought and forcing himself back into it.

It was after the grand auction that it all grew too much for him and he decided to slip quietly away, as he had seen many do even while newcomers kept arriving. He found his way, down stairs and through chattering throngs, to the main entrance hall, but he had not yet decided how and where to find his hat when a hand fell upon his arm and the troubling faint perfume came to his nostrils and a voice spoke in his ear.

"Traitor!" said Mrs. Van Teller—and he turned sharply to see her standing a little above him on the first tread of the wide, sweeping stairway. She looked amazingly beautiful, with the ripe, un-ageing beauty of Olympus, and the strange, almost blue-white hair seemed, as he looked up at her, the only possible crown for the face beneath it.

She stepped down from the slight eminence and stood beside him, her hand still on his arm. She said:

"I know it's all very dull and stupid, Nils. But think of the money we'll be sending to Athens!"

Otto murmured something. He was looking at her eyes and finding, for the fifth or sixth time in the three days he had known her, that they were not quite as he had remembered them.

"Don't tell me!" she said, smiling at him. "You were going to leave! You know you were! . . . Don't. Wait

just a little while. They'll all go soon; then we'll have a chat and a drink together—just you and I. I want to thank you—and talk to you about your plans, and . . ."

She broke off, catching sight of a group, about to depart, who were looking towards her expectantly. She moved towards them, talking as she went, but Otto could still feel

the pressure of her fingers upon his arm.

He turned back as if to go up the stairs again. He would stay. He would, if such a thing proved possible, find himself a solitary corner and sit there, with a glass of champagne, until she tound him. The waiting would probably be long, but wass denn—he had much to think about.

He went slowly up the stairs, past a steady flow of people coming down. It was a long and tedious journey, for all of them stared and many paused to speak with him and shake his hand. But he reached the second floor at last and the open doors of the huge so-called music room. It was still seething with people—and their senseless clattering suddenly filled him with rage.

He turned abruptly away, afraid he might not be able to keep his feelings from his face—and he came into rard

collision with a hurrying man.

"Hey!" said Karl Etter. "Oh, hello, Jorgensen, glad to see you. Say, you went over big to-night—nice going!" He hurried away, throwing a "See you later!" over his shoulder as he went, a lean, shambling figure in dinner clothes only redeemed from disreputability by his unstudied disregard for them.

Otto stared after him without moving, smitten suddenly by an idea which, the longer he considered it, grew more and more into certainty. It explained everything—the strange delay of the Machine in approaching him, the inescapable and growing feeling that he was going through a period of test—everything!

He became conscious that someone was addressing him, and found himself looking down at a small and elderly woman who, by reason of her simple gown and crutched ebony cane, might have stepped out of another century.

On the lined old face was a shy and sweet and determined smile, and the eyes which looked up at him were bright and

blue and impossibly young.
"You must forgive me," she was saying. "But I had to speak to you. I don't know many people here and there was no one to present us to each other." Her voice was shy, like her smile-and Otto was irresistibly reminded, despite the absence of any similarity in feature or voice or manner, of the mother he could barely remember.

He did not, this time, have to force the smile which came to his face. He bowed, perhaps a little more gracefully than Nils Jorgensen should have bowed. said:

"I am happy that you spoke." He waited, cutting off unborn a pleasant little phrase far too polished for any

young seaman, however heroic.

She said: "I heard you speak, in the theatre. And I have been watching you." The words came shyly and the lined face was tinted with a little flush, but the youthful eyes were steady with brave purpose.

She said: "You have suffered. They have killed the people you love. But you are going to fight them-vou have fought them already: you saved one life they would

have taken."

Otto looked at her. He thought he was not hearing what she said.

She said: "They aren't bad, you know-not the young men; they are taught and led by an evil Idea. And other young men-young men like you-are going to show them that what they have been taught is wrong." She laid her hand upon his arm. "They don't know-yet-that they cannot win; that an Evil Idea cannot beat a Good Idea. But you will help to teach them!"

Otto smiled down at her with vague tenderness: he was haunted increasingly by persistent, improbable reminiscence of his mother.

"I am going now," she said, and moved the hand which had been upon his sleeve and offered it to him.

He bowed over it and put it to his lips—perhaps too

un-Nils-like a gesture, but there was no one to see. She smiled at him again and went away, walking slowly and leaning on her cane.

Otto looked after her for a moment; then dutifully wrenched himself from vague, lavender-scented nostalgia back to duty and the new thought which the sight of Karl Etter had given him. He walked across to a lone settee near the doors of the music room and dropped on to it and ordered his mind.

Yes, it was a good thought—more, it was right! Simply because upon two previous occasions the Machine had made the contact between him and itself did not mean that this must always be the case. Of course it did not—there had been nothing said in that strange interview on the upper floor in the Berlin suburban house which could be construed to mean that. In fact, stress had been laid upon initiative. . . .

He jumped to his feet, his course clear before him. Since his landing in New York—a landing arranged neatly by the Machine in the person of Karl Etter, he had been left to himself, as a test of his initiative! The Machine was waiting for him; waiting to see whether, left on his own in these unforeseen and unlikely circumstances, he was man enough to communicate with it or hidebound enough to wait indefinitely, an over-disciplined jelly-fish!

(iii)

He found Etter at the bar in what they seemed to call the Venetian Room, talking to a group which included the Swedish Consul. He stood at the bar close to this group and ordered a glass of champagne. The Consul saw him and came over and shook hands—and he was drawn into the company.

He endured patiently while yet more people shook his hand and smiled upon him and poured out praise. He gave an 'excellent performance of Nils—and underneath wondered desperately how long they would all take to go, so that he could be alone with Etter.

They took, it seemed to him, an unconscionable time; but go they did, one by tardy one. The Consul was the

last, and he shook hands yet again.

"Your quota number," he said. "It will be through without any trouble. Come to the Consulate to-morrow . . . no, perhaps the next day." He smiled again, and went away to Nils' murmured thanks.

Etter yawned enormously, stretching long thin arms.

"Better be going," he said.

"One moment," Otto said quickly: he was waiting for the barman to move away. "When . . . at what time do you wish to take the photographs?" He managed an embarrassed chuckle. "For the Kosmo article?" he said.

"To-morrow morning." Etter stared at him. "Thought I told you. Around eleven—if that's all right with you?"

The barman had moved now. "Oh, yes," said Otto. "Yes. I wished to make sure there was no change." He pulled a little notebook from his pocket—and then the pencil. He said:

"I will note that. To be sure." He scribbled something in the book, feeling Etter's eyes on the pencil-head. Without too much parade, he put book and pencil back in

his pocket.

"What . . ." began Etter—and then broke off and spoke in an entirely different tone; spoke just as a faint perception of the perfume came to Otto's nostrils.

"My dear lady!" said Etter. "I've been waiting on

the chance of seeing you for a moment."

Mrs. Van Teller was standing between them. She smiled upon Otto and was gracious to the journalist.

"How nice of you," she said to Etter. "This is the

first moment I've had to breathe! "

Etter said: "You've done a wonderful piece of work! Wonderful!"

She smiled at him and bowed. She looked magnificent.

"Some more like you," said Etter, "who really did things—and Hitler wouldn't last a month!" His eyes

gleamed behind the spectacles, and Otto gave silent

applause.

"We can only try," she said, and gave the man her hand as he took his leave. She was turned in such a way that Otto could not move without rudeness, so he stood motionless, looking for some sign from Etter.

Etter glanced at him. "So long, Jorgensen," he said casually. "See you in the morning. I'll be around first—

before the photographers."

"Yes," said Otto. "Yes. Thank you." A great weight was lifted from his mind. He was conscious of the perfume again and the marble perfection of the shoulders against the dark velvet.

"Benson!" She was speaking to the man behind the bar. "Close this now. Most of the guests have gone." She slipped a hand into the crook of Otto's arm—and he found himself walking beside her from the room and along a corridor which he had not been in before. She said:

"There's something about that man Etter I don't like.
... You were a nice boy to wait such a long time." She laughed softly. "But it was bad of you to try and run

away. Suppose I hadn't caught you! "

They stopped walking and she was opening a door and they were entering a small, pretty room which seemed half-

study, half-library. She said:

"If I were a man, I suppose they'd call this my 'den.' But it's nice, don't you think? Now you just sit down and be comfortable. There are drinks there. . . . Mix yourself one . . . and smoke . . . and wait—for me just five minutes while I speed the left-overs."

She was gone, and Otto was left staring at the door. After a moment he crossed to the side-table where the tray was and poured himself a small drink. He carried the glass around the room, looking at pictures without seeing them; noting without conscious thought the several inner doors—three in all—which led from this room to others; thinking, very deliberately, about nothing at all except that in no circumstances should his reactions be other than those of Nils Jorgensen.

(iv)

She was back in less than ten minutes—and with her was a man-servant who carried a tray and champagne glasses and a silver-bound oaken bucket from which, beneath the napkin which covered the ice, protruded the neck of a gold-foiled bottle.

"Down there, Charles." She pointed. "And the glasses

here. No, don't open it."

The man obeyed with silent deftness and was gone, the door closing softly behind him. Otto crushed out the cigarette he had just lighted—and then took another one. He became aware that his hostess had crossed behind him and was now sitting at the strange-shaped little writingtable. He lighted the new cigarette and smiled at hereven Nils Jorgensen could do that!

She said: "We'll have a drink in a minute, Nils." She had opened the centre drawer of the desk and was searching in it. The strange hair gleamed and the soft light caressed

the smoothness of her shoulders.

She said: "I want to write an address down for you—now, while I remember it. I'll tell you why later." She took a pad of paper from the drawer and began to scribble

fast upon it in a large dashing script.

A sound came from Otto's lips; a strange sound, instantly repressed, which was half grunt, half gasp. He had come nearer to the table as she took out the paper—and now he was staring at the pencil with which she was writing: it was a small, slim thing of gold and silver, but in place of its cap was a tiny, neatly whittled plug of cedar-wood!

The point broke, and she threw the thing down with a gesture of annoyance. She said, without looking up:

"Lend me a pencil, will you? This has broken."

Automatically, Otto's hand went to his breast-pocket and came away with his own pencil. He laid it on the table, near her hand. His mind felt numb. She picked it up and sat back in her chair and looked at him. Her face was different somehow: the eyes seemed to have changed colour. It was difficult for Otto to meet their scrutiny.

He was waiting for her to speak; but she did not and he remembered. He said:

"It . . . must be very late. Do you please know the time?"

"It's seventy-one minutes past the hour—or earlier." Her voice, whetted to a sharp edge of impersonality, was

as changed as her face.

"The thirtieth of February is the day," she said then—and Otto's cup of somehow humiliating astonishment was filled to overflowing, for this was the phrase which meant that its user was no mere cog in the Machine but a master part.

He stood stiffly to attention now, though it is doubtful that he knew he was doing so. The eyes which had seemed to change colour studied him through a long silence. His mouth felt dry, and he moistened his lips with the point of his tongue. He tried to keep all sign of feeling from his face. She said:

"You seem . . . astounded, Captain."

"I . . . • I confess I am . . . surprised." Otto fumbled

over his words. Again he tried to moisten his lips.

The eyes still studied him. "You should not show it—in your new line of duty." She took a cigarette from a silver box and put it between her lips. "A match," she said. "In front of you there."

Otto had to force himself to move. He took a match from the glass bowl and broke it in striking and had to use another. He succeeded this time and bent over the desk, shielding the flame in hands which refused to obey his command to be completely steady.

She lit the cigarette and leaned back in her chair and

looked at him again.

"You've been wondering when your orders would come." She made the words statement rather than question. "And in what manner."

Otto stood stiffly before the desk and was silent.

She said: "We didn't approach you before: you were being studied." She knocked ash from the cigarette. "You did well under the circumstances—quite well."

She waited-and Otto knew he must speak. He said,

awkwardly:

"I did not know what to do. It was difficult. I decided that I should act in all matters like a Jorgensen." He wished she would move her eyes.

She dropped the cigarette into an ash tray, but did not

shift her gaze.

"Having made the first mistake," she said, "you were right. But it was a bad mistake—a dereliction of duty, Captain."

The tone was cold yet hotly stinging, like a lash. She

said:

"You are honoused by being chosen for special duty—and you deliberately endanger your life by endeavouring to save the lives of enemies. It is only the purest chance that you were saved. Another hour and you'd have drowned; but without the burden you could have lasted far, far longer. . . . A bad beginning, Captain!"

The tone was harsher even than the words. A tinge of red showed in Otto's face, and he stood yet more rigidly.

She waited, but he still did not speak. She said sharply:

"Have you nothing to say?"

"A very little." Otto's speech was slow and heavy. "It was . . . accident. The boy showed a way to get off the ship. It was the only way. So the three of us were together when we jumped."

A lie came to him and he clutched at it. He said:

"Something struck my head. I do not remember much until I was in the water a long time. You understand?"

"Go on," she said.

"We were all together in . . . in a knot." Speech was easier now, and the words came more quickly. "I do not know who was helping the other among us. I made great effort, but my head was strange again from the blow. . . . Somehow the woman's hair is tied around my neck. I do

not know whether the boy did this, or the woman. And the boy's hands are . . . are locked around my life jacket. I cannot get loose without my head going under the water. . . . That is all there is. After a very long time, the boat found us."

He felt suddenly flat and wilted. The lie which had seemed so good was ashes in his mouth. He wondered drearily what would happen to him now.

She said: "I see. It is possible—quite possible." She seemed to be thinking aloud, but her voice was clear and

hard again when she went on. She said:

"I will tell you now, Captain, that whether or not you were guilty of dereliction of duty, things have worked themselves out well for you—very well. You are solidly established as a gallant, German-hating Swede; so solidly that it would be almost impossible to make the fools believe that you were in the service of the Reich even if one tried to give them proof. That is excellent—more than we could have hoped for! On top of that, Nils Jorgensen will shortly be a legitimate immigrant to this country—again more than we could have hoped for in the ordinary way."

She took another cigarette from the silver box, and this time Otto had a match burning and ready. She tilted back her chair and looked up at him through a blue veil of smoke. He met the gaze with eyes studiously blank, but behind them his mind raced. He was feeling better now: the lie had worked and the reprimand was past and he had not disgraced himself in the new service and he was rapidly adjusting to the revolutionary changes which had been wrought in the past quarter-hour; in the fifteen minutes which had seen an invisible wand transmute Nils Jorgensen back into Otto Falken, and a beautiful, exciting benefactress into a superior officer, harsh-tongued and autocratic. He stood motionless, wondering at the confusion of feeling which surged through him beneath the racing thoughts.

"So now," she said at last, and as if there had been no pause, "you can begin duty, Captain." She sat straight now and ground out the half-smoked cigarette. She took

her eyes from Otto's face for the first time, looking down at her hand as if in thought—and he immediately became acutely conscious of her beauty: it struck him strangely and without volition of thought. He felt almost as if he were seeing it for the first time.

Unconsciously, he relaxed the tautness of his stance a little; then, as she looked up at him, snapped once more

into rigid immobility.

"Pay careful attention to what you're going to hear." Her words were slower than before. "You are going to be told a great deal. And you are going to receive your orders. You will repeat them to me afterwards."

"Yes," said Otto. "I understand."

She leant her arms upon the edge of the table and began to talk.

(v)

She said:

"We are servants—soldiers—of the Fuehrer and the Reich. There are many thousands of us here in North America. Most of us, like myself and you, are Germanborn, but none of us are the 'fifth columnists' they write about in the newspapers. Nor are we the 'Nazi agents' pursued by the energetic bloodhounds of the Federal Bureau of Investigation; and no one of us is remotely likely to be uncovered by the clumsy rake of Mr. Dies. . . .

"No, Captain, we (the real soldiers of the Fuehrer) are all thoroughly spangled with the stars of Liberty and thickly lacquered with the zebra stripes of Democracy. We are, in fact, a daring division of special shock troops wearing the enemy's uniform and therefore of far greater danger to him than our numbers would suggest. . . .

"This division, of course, is split into many subsidiary units. Each unit, except that its functions are controlled by a central command, is entirely independent of any others; does not, in fact, even know where or what the others may be. I have told you that they exist—and that

is all I shall tell you except as regards the one in which

you yourself will serve. . . .

"This is—for the time being at least—the most important unit of them all: it is the one which brings about the major acts of general sabotage; I do not mean the destructions caused in particularized places such as factories where the damage can be done by one or two individuals who merely have to seize opportunity, I mean the outside attacks which must be carefully planned and executed by picked bodies of men. A great chain of such major operations has been brilliantly planned—and even begun. It will continue, in mounting importance, over the immensely critical period of the next six months. . . .

"The leader of this unit has been hampered by lack of trustworthy and efficient lieutenants. When you join him —which will be within the next four or five weeks—you will at once become what in this country they would

probably call his Chief Executive Assistant. . . .

"That, Captain, will be your duty. It is important work—and you will carry it out efficiently, giving your superior officer all the assistance in your power. . . .

"But there is more to your appointment than this—very much more! While you will work indirectly for the Reich through Rudolph Altinger, you will, also and primarily, work directly for the Reich as an investigator of

Rudolph Altinger. . . .

"In other words, Captain, there is doubt in high places concerning Herr Altinger's personal ambitions—and you are in America primarily to report upon him. You will make such reports to me as and when I order you to, which I shall do either in person or through another of your superiors who will reveal himself to you in the manner you already know. You will never, of course, reveal to any other person the nature of your primary duty. . . .

"That is an outline of your duties, Captain. I will now,

more specifically, give you detailed orders. . . ."

(vi)

"And that," said Otto, "I think is all." He had given, carefully and with a slow, deliberate brevity, a recountal of all he had been told. The small room was very quiet, and the smoke from another of her cigarettes hung blue in the silence.

"All right," she said. "Excellent!" Her voice was

freer, softer.

He waited. She was not looking at him now, but he had a curious certainty that, when she did, her eyes would seem yet again to be changed in colour.

She stood up and moved away from the desk.

"Don't you think," she said, "that you've stood like

that long enough?"

She walked past him to a small, deep settee against the wall. She sat back in its softness and pulled a cushion behind her head. Otto moved uncertainly, turning with his back to the desk so that he faced her. He put his hands behind him and leaned upon the desk. He felt oddly conscious of every movement he was making, like a schoolboy among unexpected adults.

She was playing with a bracelet upon her arm and the soft light struck from it flashing little darts of multi-

coloured flame.

"Open the wine," she said—and watched him as he took the bottle from the ice-pail and stripped off wire and foil and eased out deftly the swollen, reluctant cork.

With a task to perform the feeling of awkwardness had left him and he moved freely and without thought and set a glass for her down upon the table by the couch and filled it carefully and turned to his own.

A faint smile touched the corners of her mouth. "Nils Jorgensen! "she said, and raised her glass towards him and drank from it.

Otto sat upon the arm of a chair to face her. A fresh wave of uncertainty swept uncomfortably over him. After

a moment he raised his glass to her and drank without speaking. She did not seem to be looking at him. He sought desperately for words—any words—but none would come.

"You're very silent, Otto Falken," she said suddenlyand the voice was neither the one nor the other of the two extremes he had learned to know, but something which was somewhere in between these two so distant poles.

"I am sorry," he said carefully, "perhaps I am confused.

But the word 'confused' is wrong a little.'

"I probably understand." Again the faint smile at the corners of her mouth. "There's a lot for you to think about, isn't there?" She turned more fully towards him, resting upon one elbow and with the other hand holding out her glass. "Refill that," she said. "And then perhaps I'll help you."

He brought the bottle and poured from it.

"And your own," she said, watching him while he obeyed. "You want to ask questions—a lot of questions —about all manner of different things. Don't you? Well, you may. I will do my best to answer. I suggest that, first of all, you get the duty ones out of the way." The smile was not touching her mouth now—but was it in her voice?

"Ask!" she said. "Don't be afraid . . . Captain. This is unofficial discussion of matters already communicated to you officially: it's what they would call here 'off the record.' It is your duty to seek full enlightenment, and mine to give it."

"I understand," said Otto. "First then, please: the journalist Etter?" He did not look at her eyes as he spoke. "Is he . . ."

She cut him short. "Absolutely not. But I thought you might be thinking so. I saw you writing for him with the pencil." Her tone suddenly changed. "You said nothing, of course?"

The tone brought Otto to his feet again. He said, woodenly:

"No. I spoke nothing."

"Of course not." She sank back upon the cushions and

her voice was soft again. "And you were doing your duty in trying to make contact."

Otto remained upon his feet. "And the Consul?" he

said slowly. "The Swedish Consul?"

She shook her head. "I wish he were. But he isn't. You were naturally enough misled by the quota number gesture: it was such a stroke of luck!"

The idiom was too much for Otto. He said:

"I am sorry . . ."

"A piece of good fortune, a gift of Fate, a lucky chance. Because he thought you were a Swede and had done something heroic he gave you the best thing at his command—or what he thinks the best thing." She was smiling at him now.

"Thank you," Otto said. "I understand. That is one part over of my questions." He realized for the first time that he was still standing. With a momentary return of the schoolboy self-consciousness, he sat down again upon the chair-arm. He said:

"The next perhaps I should not ask. I am not sure." He saw that her glass was empty and rose again and fetched the wine and refilled it, looking carefully at what he was doing and not at her face. She said:

"You had better try. There's no penalty."

"It is this then," Otto said: "the . . . the sabotages—the attacks to be made by my . . . my unit—you said

that they had already been started?"

"Yes," She sipped at the wine. "There have already been four, spread over the past ten weeks. They will increase, as the chain develops, in two ways: they will happen more frequently—and they will be of progressive importance."

A startling thought came to Otto's mind. He said:

"The big dam—in Ne . . . Neb . . . a State to the west? Was that . . . ?"

She did not speak; but she slowly nodded in answer, watching his face.

For a flicker of time, Otto's eyes were wide: three days ago, the whole face of his newspaper had been given to this

disaster-and still, even to-day, its repercussions were upon the front page, cheek by jowl with Churchill's latest speech. "That is big work," he said slowly.

"It was good enough," she said. "For only the fourth in the chain, it was excellent."

"It was indeed clever," Otto said. "Because everyone has written in my newspapers that it was not possibly sabotage."

She swung her feet to the floor and was suddenly standing near to him. He had forgotten that she was so tall. She moved towards the desk and he stepped back quickly, out of her way. A tenuous, barely perceptible waft of the perfume came to him.

She went around the desk and opened an unlocked drawer. "Altinger is brilliant," she said. "As I've explained, it isn't his work which you are to watch." She took a thick folder from the drawer and laid it upon the desk top and flipped it open to reveal a tidy mass of newspaper clippings.

"Come here, Captain," she said-and, as Otto stood beside her, separated some dozen of the clippings from the

bulk and thrust them into his hands.

He stood awkwardly, looking down at the mess of paper. She was very close to him now, and on his right sleeve, above the elbow, was a fine white dusting of powder from her shoulder. She said:

"Keep those: they're reports on various aspects of what they call the Nazi menace." She smiled. "And don't be afraid of anyone knowing you have them: you can even say that I gave them to you. You see, you and I are enthusiastic enemies of the New Germany. Carolyn Van Teller and Nils Jorgensen, each in their own way, are such virulent anti-Nazis that they see the fifth column in everything-so much so, in fact, that their friends laugh at them about it! "

He thrust the clippings into an inner pocket, and as he withdrew his hand she surprisingly caught it with her own. She said:

"You understand me, don't you?" There was a vehe-

mence in her tone which he had not heard before. "You see how good a camouflage that is. I have used it always—and the more I use it the better it becomes."

Her fingers were closed over his. They pressed hard, with a surprising strength, as if she were trying to drive home a point of argument. But their touch was disturbing; it sent through Otto's arm the tingling, crepitant little shock which he could not forget.

"I . . . I understand quite," he said uncertainly. "It

is good."

The fingers released his hand, but he could still feel their touch. She moved away from him and leaned over the desk and pulled the folder towards her. She opened it, turning over its contents one by one.

"There's another here," she said, "which you could have . . . a speech I made to the main Committee of the

Anglo-Saxon Union . . . against the Bunds. . . . "

She stopped abruptly, staring down at a large portrait which covered a full page. Otto moved closer to her and leaned one hand on the desk and peered at the picture.

It was of Charles De Gaulle—and at the head of the

page was the word "Kosmo."

There was odd silence while she stared down at the photograph. Otto's mind was divided: half of it wondered what this interest in the Frenchman might portend, the other was lost in contemplative admiration of the amazing contrasts between firm white skin and soft black velvet.

She straightened and turned to face him in a single swift movement. He stepped back, staring at her. The eyes had changed again, and when she spoke it was in the voice which had kept him at attention. She said:

"I had forgotten that Nils Jorgensen was to be a Kosmo Personality. When are they to take your photograph?"

Otto forced himself to meet the eyes. "To-morrow,"

he said. "In the morning. At eleven o'clock."

She went around the desk and sat in the chair. The eyes seemed never to leave his face. She closed the folder and put it back into the drawer from which she had taken it. She said:

"This is a matter of importance. It was foolish of me

to let it slip my mind-extremely foolish."

She paused for a moment, drawing a hand across her forehead. Otto stood rigid before the desk again: it was as if there had been no interlude.

"They will want to take a full-face photograph of you." The voice and eyes might never have been other than these. "But it cannot be allowed: the wide publication of an excellent portrait can fix a face too firmly in too many minds, Captain—and while just now it is desirable enough to have Nils Jorgensen well known, it might not always be so. You follow?"

"I understand," Otto said slowly. "Yes." He wondered what was to come.

"Turn around," she said suddenly. "Sideways; so that

I can see your profile."

Otto did not move at once, and she said: "Quick!" in a tone which brought instant action. He turned smartly to his right, like a parade-ground soldier, so that his left shoulder was to the desk. Under his cheekbones were two dull red patches. He was elaborately at attention.

He stood motionless for minutes which might have been hours. But she said at last:

"Now the other side." He heard the rasp of a striking match, and while he wheeled in a full about-turn, saw that she was lighting a cigarette.

He was motionless again, his right shoulder now to the

desk.

"Better." She spoke almost at once this time. "Less character than the other. . . . All right."

He knew that she meant him to face her and turned to

do so. She said:

"You must only be taken in profile—right profile. And it would be useless merely to ask the man Etter to take you like that—we must be sure that he has to!"

Otto knew that he must speak now. He said carefully:

"There seems one way sure only." He paused, but she merely nodded, and after a moment he went on. He was

meeting her eyes now but he could read nothing in them. He said:

"With my face, on the right side, injured—" he was fumbling a little with his words—"with a bruising . . ." She said: "Exactly," and nothing more.

"It is simple," he said—and turned from the desk and took two paces to the centre of the small room and stood looking about him with quick, darting glances. He was

very straight—and he could feel eyes upon his back.

He chose the sharp, unrounded corner of the wall which jutted out to make a little alcove around the centre of the three inner doors. He crossed to it with quick, light steps and stood for a moment measuring his distance and then, bent nearly double, lunged at it with his head in a quick, viciously stabbing movement like the striking of a snake.

There was a bright flash of flame inside his skull, and a hollow sound in his ears and a stab of pain across his forehead, in the centre of his right eyebrow, which managed to be simultaneously vivid and numbing. He staggered. His mind rocked, but he knew everything that he was doing -even that he had lunged harder than was necessary.

With immense effort he stood upright. The floor rocked under his feet but he held himself steady with an iron will: he would not, he swore it behind jaw-muscles clenched into jutting wads of steel, so much as sway. He would turn in a moment and go back to the desk on

unwavering feet.

He felt a warm trickling over his right cheek. He turned—and the floor rose up at him and he fell. He tried wildly to save himself this bitter indignity—and found himself ludicrous upon hands and knees, like an uncle playing pony for the children.

He heard a movement somewhere and reached out blindly and felt the arm of a heavy chair, comfortingly solid. Desperately, he dragged himself up on to the seat

of it before he could be helped.

The effort seemed to take sight from him and there was a black whirling before his eyes. He muttered something and forced his head down low and felt the warm stream

angle over his chin and drip upon his hands.

His head cleared and he raised it cautiously. He was alone in the room, but one of the inner doors stood open. He found blood on his hands and shirt and felt with tentative fingers at the eye. Above it was a hard swelling lump and below, over the high cheekbone, a soft dough-like puffiness.

She came through the open door carrying a small tray of bright metal upon which were a little bowl of china and other things which he could not see. He made a movement

as if to stand but she quelled it with a gesture.

He leant back in the chair and mopped at the blood on his face with a handkerchief. The right temple was throbbing and his whole head ached a little—but it was nothing. He wished that he had lost an eye rather than fallen like that, awkward and ludicrous and abased.

She put the tray upon a side-table and moved this near to the chair. She took a little towel of linen from the tray and put it around his neck, above his collar, and in a moment was bathing the cut above his eye.

She ceased the bathing and said: "This will hurt," and

dabbed something cold upon the cut.

It did hurt—and while he was thinking about it, she took more wet cotton and wiped the dried blood from his cheek and chin. He said:

"You should not do this. It is all right. . . . I can do this."

"Be quiet!" Her voice was so soft that it was almost a whisper.

She stood behind him and he could not see her, but he knew from the voice that her eyes had changed.

The towel was twitched from beneath his chin—and in a moment he felt her hand laid softly upon the uninjured side of his forehead and again he felt the curious tingling shock which came at her touch.

8 SAN FRANCISCO

And so Nils Jorgensen, resident and registered alien and hero of the *Vulcania* sinking and protégé of Carolyn Van Teller and subject of the best-to-date of the *Kosmo Personality* articles, was found a job by his influential benefactress and went forthwith to work in the office of Alvin Gray, millionaire builder and housing expert.

Alvin Gray's headquarters were at Welham Park in the State of New Jersey. and there Nils Jorgensen joined the staff and rapidly showed marked aptitude for his work and became without effort a favourite with his colleagues and with Gray himself and also with numerous young and middle-aged residents of the pleasant little town, particu-

larly the family with whom he lodged.

He was there for nearly a month before anything happened—and although Nils seemed always his quiet and simple and charming and industrious self, Otto was possessed by a seething fury of impatience. So much so, indeed, that at times he was hard pressed to keep the tension from showing in the face and behaviour of Nils: he bethought himself of Carolyn Van Teller's advice about protective colouring and began upon comprehensive study of Democracy's so-called viewpoint: he took distorted satisfaction, since his duty made him a liar, in being a really intensive one. Since duty forbade his being violent against the foes of his country, he found fierce, ever-growing pleasure in being violent for them. It became a byword in the office—and even at the tennis-club, where he was regarded rightly as the choicest piece of luck they had had for many seasons—that one had to be careful what one said about the War in front of him. He flayed Isolationists with a rush of words, was rabid on the subject of the fifth column, stated flatly that defence workers who struck should be shot, and once went so far as to throw a house guest of Mrs. Vincent Perry's into the lake for expressing admiration of Colonel Lindbergh.

And, by the end of the second week of this self-imposed training course in enemy viewpoint, he could quote—and frequently did—whole passages of Roosevelt, Churchill and De Gaulle in bitter arguments with any critic, however well-intentioned, of the Allied Cause or its defenders.

(ii)

His orders came at the end of his fourth week in Welham Park—and within three days he was beginning a journey by road across the continent. He drove his own car, a gift from Mrs. Van Teller in appreciation of his appearance at the Greek Relief entertainment. It was a good American car, neither too large nor too small, and in the back of it were a trunk and suitcase filled with good American clothes. He was, as he drove through the springgreen eastern countryside, a sight and fact to bring pleasure to honest American eyes and warmth to kindly American hearts—a young man who had been born a foreigner but was now on the way to American citizenship; a young man who had proved himself, in a brief moment of glory, to be a true defender of Democracy and who now was prospering through hard American work on high American wages; a young man whose foreign background was romantic and honest and true and who now was rapidly collecting an American history equally unimpeachable; a young man of good looks and brains and brawn, an athlete and a worker, steady but far from priggish, vastly attractive to women yet highly popular with men; a young man, it seemed, with only one fault and that almost a virtue—a violent, allabsorbing hatred of the Nazi-Fascist ideals and way of life.

(iii)

He arrived in San Francisco six days and some odd hours after leaving Welham Park. He had vastly enjoyed the journey, principally, he thought, because it was a prelude to the adventure of active service but also because of the personal vision it had given him of this vast, incredible country of America. Before, even while he was in New York and Welham Park, the bigness and variety of America had been things which he knew only academically, as figures and graphs of distance and contour and industry —but now he had felt America himself with his own eyes and senses and the body which he had transported from one end of America to the other. He had, in some three and a half thousand miles of driving and one hundred and fifty hours of time, passed through every conceivable kind of country and weather and city. He had driven through sunshine and snowstorm, flood and drought, dusty plains and cloud-tipped mountains, ever-changing forests and never-changing fields of wheat; through fog so thick that he could not see ten feet ahead of him and through sunshine so strong that he could only see through narrowed eyes. He had traversed cities where the pall of smoke hung so thick and low that he could not see the sky, and over hills where there was nothing but sky to see. He had eaten in hotels and tourist camps and farmhouses and by a prospector's fire and in halts for lorry-drivers. He had slept under one blanket on desert sand and shivered in a bed under five. He had seen and spoken with business men and cowboys, shop-girls and soldiers, miners and farmers and lumbermen and college boys, housewives and salesmen, saleswomen and priests and hobos and waitresses; with two stranded airmen and a small-town policeman—even with one Revivalist whose eyes flared insanely and a circus attendant looking for a mislaid leopard. He had swum in five rivers and one ocean and spent three hours in the stuffy jail of a Midwestern town, charged with driving at forty miles an hour in a twenty-five-mile zone and condemned to await the local judge's return from a belated luncheon. He had crossed America.

(iv)

It was mid-afternoon when he arrived in San Francisco. He drove in over the Bay Bridge after stopping in Oakland for two hours at a small hotel where he bathed and changed his clothes and, like the methodical tactician that he was, charted upon a big-scale map of the city his course to the San Francisco offices of R. Altinger and Horwood Incorporated—Production Homes.

They were on June Street, a difficult place to find even for a San Franciscan—and as he drove carefully along the narrow, congested stream of Market Street, and up and down the sudden, steeply looming hills so improbably clothed in pavement and buildings, he had cause to bless

the map and his patient study of it.

But June Street was where it should be, and he turned into it, weaving between the street-cars and a lorry. There was no parking-space at either curb, but he found a garage and left his car there and walked back to the Jackson Building. He went straight to the lift and said: "Four, please," as they did in New York, and was carried swiftly up. Outside the ground-glass doorway marked '407' and 'Altinger and Horwood Inc.—INQUIRIES,' he halted for a moment and probed into his breast-pocket and brought out the letter addressed to 'Mr. Rudolph Altinger—Personal' and then knocked upon the door and opened it.

He knew what was in the letter—nothing that the most searching eye could not read with safety. It was from that close friend and associate of Mr. Altinger, Mr. Alvin Gray, who had apparently been approached by Mr. Altinger (and Mrs. Carolyn Van Teller) in regard to transferring to Mr. Altinger the person and services of Mr. Nils Jorgensen, that very promising young man who should surely fill

Mr. Altinger's requirements for a confidential assistant

supremely well.

There was a boy behind a long counter in the room. He took the letter which Mr. Jorgensen handed to him and vanished with it and was back almost immediately.

"This way, please," he said. "Mr. Altinger'll see you

right away." He sounded faintly surprised.

(v)

Rudolph Altinger was forty-eight years old. He was a little over medium height but seemed to be under it because of great shoulder-spread and depth of chest. He was grey-haired and blunt-faced and clean-shaven, with features which would have conveyed an impression of obstinate stupidity but for the extraordinary brightness and intelligence of his eyes. He dressed extremely well and kept himself in extremely good condition. He neither smoked nor touched alcohol, but was a bachelor with a violent and permanent leaning towards young and pretty and preferably brainless members of the other sex. was a brilliant inventor, a sound engineer, an excellent if imitative architect and the shrewdest of business men. was also-as Otto had been told and soon substantiated-a brilliant and daring guerrilla general. He was both egocentric and intensely egotistical—and Otto conceived a sort of unwilling admiration for him.

He drove Otto hard but himself harder. He kept an entirely legitimate business operating all over the country and made it succeed and worked upon it for an average of seven hours a day. He slept for another seven and thus had ten more which, after allowing a minimum for other personal activities, he dedicated to his labours for the Reich. Because it was his nature to be intensely secretive, he was at first as uncommunicative as possible with Otto, but as the weeks slipped by and time pressed upon him and he found that never, under any circumstances, would

Otto, either in regard to the business of the firm or the business of the Fuehrer, let him down, he began increasingly to admit his lieutenant to fuller confidence. Once started on this path, he seemed to gather speed with every day, taking a sort of pleasure in keeping nothing backso that by mid-June Otto was in possession of so much knowledge that he could have carried on the work of the 'unit' without a break. He knew the names and persons of the three hundred and fifty men who made up the permanent body, and the names of other key men who could be called upon for help when necessary, each of them able to provide other men for certain work at certain times. He knew the details of every 'attack' to come in the chain of which he had been told, and the approximate dates of each He knew even the names and addresses and signs of every other unit commander in the country and the names, all illustrious, of the four men who, with Carolyn Van Teller, formed the Staff Council for America. He knew all these things and a mass of further detail.

He was asked for his first report on Altinger exactly a month after he arrived in San Francisco, when he was well on the way to all the knowledge. He had a letter from his benefactress, a friendly, kindly inquiring note which wondered how her protégé was coming along and incidentally mentioned that her good friend (and incidentally a countryman of Nils'), Mr. Gunnar Bjornstrom, would be at the Mark Hopkins for a week or so: would Nils, like a dear boy, call upon old Mr. Bjornstrom and ask whether there was anything he could do for him?

Nils saw Mr. Bjornstrom—a withered, kindly, cheerful old gentleman. Mr. Bjornstrom gave him a drink and borrowed a pencil from him and asked him the time and was very courteous and entirely satisfactory. Otto reported

to Mr. Bjornstrom.

"Altinger," said Otto, "is a brilliant man. His work is good, and will get better. He is telling me everything by pieces and I will know it all soon. But—yet—I do not know what he thinks about himself when . . . after victory. It is too soon for me to know. He is an egoistical

man. Very. But I do not know yet to what extent this carries him. I think that I can find out—but not yet."

Mr. Bjornstrom seemed satisfied. He gave Otto another

drink and they went to the theatre together.

(vi)

Miss Irving, who was Altinger's San Francisco secretary,

brought the morning mail in to Otto.

"Good morning, Mr. Jorgensen!" Miss Irving was forty and determinedly bright and once had been pretty and thought Mr. Altinger was very difficult but ever so much better since Mr. Jorgensen had taken so much of the work off his shoulders. She also thought that Mr. Jorgensen was ever so good-looking and so nice. She would, quite honestly, have deemed anyone insane who suggested that either Mr. Altinger or Mr. Jorgensen were anything more than the industrious businessmen they seemed.

She put the pile of opened letters at Otto's elbow and laid directly before him a bulky envelope, still sealed. She

said:

"It's another one from that pesky old Mr. Blum! But I didn't quite like to open it because he's marked it 'Personal' and underlined it!"

Otto laughed, for Mr. Blum was an office joke—an elderly fuss-budget who wanted one of the Altinger houses but could never make up his mind where to put it. He said:

"Probably he wants a trailer now—to put the house on," and Miss Irving laughed trillingly and thought that

was such a funny idea.

She went, and Otto, after a decent interval, wandered into Altinger's room, which, as a confidential assistant, he used freely when its owner wasn't there. It was a pleasant room—sunny and comfortably furnished. And it was sound-proof, because Mr. Altinger could not bear to work with any outside distraction.

Otto opened the letter from the pesky Mr. Blum and found the usual four-page diatribe and quickly decoded it. For convenience, he scribbled the inner message upon a sheet from Altinger's desk-pad. He then memorized it and burnt the sheet and dropped the ashes into Altinger's waste-paper basket and picked up an outside telephone.

He found Altinger at the third number he dialled.

"Sorry to trouble," he said. "But I wished confirmation on the Seattle Number Four contract."

"It's okay," said Altinger's harsh voice. "Go ahead.

Anything else?"

"Nothing," Otto said. "Except another letter from Blum—he now wishes to find a site some place half-way between here and the Oregon border."

"Old fool!" said Altinger. "Well—I'll phone him when I get to the office. I'll be there anyway in about half

an hour."

But he was there in eleven minutes.

"I don't quite understand," Otto said when they were alone. "But you will perhaps. The decoding says: 'Tipping and Coley Seattle bound Thursday. Nine-thirty P.M. leave San. F. Make utmost endeavour."

Altinger swore roundly. He said:

"I knew it! What an infernal nuisance! But there's nothing for it—it's order, and there you are!" He looked at Otto with a wolfish grin. "You'll have to handle part of it."

"What is it?" said Otto patiently. "Who are Tipping

and Coley? And what is there to do?"

Altinger threw himself into his swivel chair and cocked his feet on the desk. He said:

"It's a nasty job, young Jorgensen. And there isn't time to plan it properly. Hit-or-miss sort of thing—only we'd better not miss!" He brought his feet down with a slam and leaned on the desk and pointed to the chair facing him.

"Siddown," he said. "And get a load of it. Tipping and Coley are both Senators. Tipping's a Democrat, Coley's a Republican—but they're both Interventionists—violent. There's been a scheme cooked up in the White

House to give 'em an Investigation Committee: like Dies' but a whole hell of a lot tougher—and quieter. The Staff Council think they're very important; that if they really get going they'll get wise to a lot of things." His lip curled. "That's what the Council thinks—so we obey orders. And the orders are to wreck the train. Nine-thirty to-morrow night—ummmm!"

He leaned back in his chair and put his feet on the desk again, looking up at the ceiling in his usual attitude of

thought with head on one side and one eye closed.

There was a long silence which Otto broke at last. He said:

"To wreck a train is not to make sure of killing any

two particular people on that train."

Altinger brought his gaze down from the ceiling. "You said it! But you've heard of orders, haven't you? And if we choose the right place and make a right job, it's thirty to one we get 'em. Shut up while I think."

He cocked his head and stared one-eyed at the ceiling again—but this time it was not long before he spoke. He

said:

"Get this. We'll use the Palitos Viaduct. It's under three hours' drive if you're fast. It's in lonely country, and there's a hell of a drop into the Arroyo Diablo. If she goes off there, there'll be nothing left of Tipping or Coley—or anything! We'll use Jannings, Derkel, Beckstein, Carson and four mechanics. Carson'll take the station wagon and three of the mechanics. Beckstein takes the Matson truck and some stuff he'll pick up from the warehouse. The others take their own cars. I'll meet them out there to-night and get the work started: I'm looking for a country site for Blum. I'll lay out the scheme and get as much work done as I can—but to-morrow you'll have to be in charge: I've a meeting with Rossin—and I can't take a chance on messing up the schedule for Plan Five. Now let's work out some details. . . .

He went on, smoothly and decisively, for five minutes. There had been nothing—and now there was a dove-tailed, workable scheme.

(vii)

But, as Altinger had said, it was perforce a hurried, hit-or-miss job, with no time for the usual Altinger precision in minutiæ: so hurried that a mistake of such dimensions was made as to bring Otto first to the edge of death and then to a complete change in his whole way of life.

On the Wednesday night, when Altinger chose the exact location and oversaw the initial work and covered up all trace of it, and then again on the night of Thursday, when Otto was in charge, it was bright moonlight, with a great yellowish moon which lit up every detail of the landscape and made the task doubly dangerous and necessitated the posting of warning guards. The pale-gold light poured relentlessly down over the mountain-side and the deep, naked canyon at its foot with the black shallow water rolling sluggishly along its bottom; over the white, graceful span of the viaduct which carried the shining tracks over the canyon from the tunnel-mouth in the side of the mountain. to the sharply curving, gleaming causeway along the top of the rolling foothills; over the serried tops of the trees which covered both flanks of the foothills with a dark. lovely cloak and left the causeway and the bright riband of the tracks it carried naked and utilitarian and yet with a harsh strength of its own which redeemed it from sheer ugliness.

The train was to pass at about one-thirty. Otto and his men should have finished their work and been dispersed and away, miles from here, by midnight. But at some minutes after eleven came an unexpected and dawdling freight train; at twelve a small railworkers' trolley. And both times, warned by the look-outs, they had not only to scurry down three hundred yards to the cover of the trees and lie in hiding while the danger passed, but also first to cover all traces of their work, which meant more wasted time in the uncovering when they could safely start again.

Altinger had planted the charge under the ties on the viaduct, towards the far or mountain side. He knew how long the train would be and this should ensure that at least the greater part of its component coaches and cars crashed through the low wall of the viaduct and hurtled to the muddy bed of the arroyo, a hundred and eighty feet below. As the engine passed over a certain tie at the beginning or foothill side of the viaduct, it would release a contact to explode the tremendously powerful charge of explosive when this was crossed at the far end—all this necessarily controlled by the setting of a switch concealed at the edge of the causeway, well upon the foothill side of the viaduct.

(viii)

It was one-twenty-six. The work was over and in less than five minutes the train would be roaring by towards the viaduct and destruction, and Otto and his men must get smoothly and quietly, swiftly and separately, away from here. They were in the safe shelter of the trees on the westward foothills, and everyone had reported his presence to Otto and checked his tools and started towards his particular car, with his route and emergency story well memorized.

Otto stood and watched their receding backs. He was just inside the shade of the trees and behind him the grassy slope stretched up to the causeway. He looked at his watch. It said twenty-eight minutes past the hour—and already he could hear a far-off rumbling which must be the train.

He closed his eyes and ran over in his mind all the orders which Altinger had given him—and the most pressing of these had been: "See they leave nothing behind. Not even the tag off a shoe lace! This can't be camouflaged—and the F.B.I.'ll be around like ants. Don't forget that—anything—anything might give those s.o.b.'s a clue!"...

Well, he had checked all the men and all the tools and

. . . His thought broke off as, his eyes opened, he stared through the moon-dappled shadow, at the departing backs.

The nearest of these was perhaps twenty yards away—and belonged to the most able of the four mechanics. He stared idly after the men—and a danger signal rang suddenly in his head.

The man was in shirt sleeves—and the man had origin-

ally climbed up from the trees to his work in a coat.

The roaring rumble of the train was closer now. There was no time to shout and bring the man back—and shouting was dangerous. There was no time to do anything—except, as he did, dart back to the outermost edge of the trees and search with his gaze the moonlit stretch of upward sloping grass.

Despite the distance, he saw the coat almost at once. It lay, right at the junction of the slope and the causeway,

a black blot upon the scene and his duty.

He broke out from the trees and, doubled up, began to climb the two hundred yards of grass-covered hill. Behind him he could hear the car engines of his men and above their sound, drowning it to anyone who did not expect it to be there, the roaring of the nearing train and a high-pitched, nerve-tearing whistle as she began upon the wide, ever-sharpening curve towards the viaduct.

He ian and slipped on the rough, dry grasses and fell and picked himself up again and clambered up. He doubled himself up as much as he dared without sacrificing speed but he felt naked and alone and startlingly visible in the flooding moonlight. The rattling roar of the train was close and swelling closer and out of the corner of his eye

he was aware of its black bulk onrushing.

He was flat on his belly now, at the top of the rise and the edge of the causeway. He flung out an arm and just missed touching the coat. The train roared above him with a whirling, shattering maelstrom of a noise, the lights from its myriad windows flashing over him darker and brighter gold than the moonlight. He gripped the grass and dragged himself upwards another foot and reached for the coat again and found it with his fingers. The train

was not past him yet, and it was travelling fast. It must

be longer than they had reckoned.

He pulled the coat towards him and let himself slide down the steepest part of the rise. When he came to a halt, he raised a cautious head and saw the engine curving around on to the viaduct. He was bound there, where he lay. He could not move. All of him was in watching eyes and waiting ears.

And then, came the sight and sound which told him Altinger had succeeded again. The sight was unreal and fantastic and like a bad piece of miniature effect in a cheap cinematograph film-and the sound was even more different from his subconscious anticipation. It went on so long. It was made up of so many different, intermingling sounds—and they went on and on and on. First the dull and tremendous and stomach-thumping roar of the explosion and then a tortured screaming of steel as pieces of the engine and first car-great monolithic inanimate chunks—separated ridiculously in air and hurtled through the stone parapet and plunged downwards out of his sight with a roaring, whistling sound which merged into the crashing and crumbling of stone and an incredible, squeaking bellow which followed as the next cars, whole and unbroken, lurched and rocked sideways and left the tracks and ploughed through more sections of the parapet and fell, shockingly twisting end over end, into the blackness.

And it all seemed to go on so long—and the minor sounds which made thin background for the major were so many and so acidly distinct—the crackle of rending wood, the shivering of glass, the wrenching, barking sound as rails and ties were torn from the earth to fly through air, the hideous rattle of fragments—even the thin, high screaming of human voices.

It all went on so long—for split seconds which were transmuted in his mind to hours; for split seconds which held him motionless as the three cars which had been added this night were torn from their predecessors before they had swung on to the viaduct. The tail of the hindmost was

only a few yards away from him, to his right and above him. All three swayed drunkenly and lurched upon their outer wheels and could not right themselves and toppled and hit the edge of the causeway with their right flanks and bounced like toys and turned over with their whirring, whizzing wheels in air and pitched down the grassy slope in wild titanic disorder. And the sound of their falling drowned in his ears the other interminable sounds from the arroyo and the bridge.

He saw what was happening before it happened. He had no time to get to his feet—and he threw himself sideways, driving his coiled body in a tremendous lateral spring, as far away as he might from the rearmost car. But he was not far enough: the main bulk of the car was far from him as it came to an end of its drunken rolling, but the surrounding air was filled with flying debris from its wrenched and shattered frame. A great bruising weight struck him behind the shoulders. It drove all the air from his lungs and he rolled convulsively upon his back, fighting for power to breathe. Another weight, heavy and crushing and violent, fell across both legs, below the knees, and he felt the crunching of smashed bones and a searing, enveloping pain which flashed up his spine and into his head and exploded there and left him in unknowing darkness.

(ix)

He struggled up out of the dark cone of insensibility. The noises had ended and there was no sound now except inside his head. His vision seemed blurred but his mind was clear. He knew everything, and his right hand still gripped the rough cloth of the coat which he must destroy. He tried to move and a flaming tongue of pain lashed up his legs and he felt the weight still upon them.

He rested, and a cold film of sweat ran into his eyes and stung them. With infinite care, he raised his body until he was sitting upright. With every movement the pain flamed in his legs but he gauged the flashes so that never would they get into his head again and deprive him of consciousness.

He laid the coat aside and got one hand to the thing upon his legs and felt it and tried its weight. It was jagged and irregular and metallic. And it was very heavy.

But he had to go away from here. And his shoulders and arms and back were inordinately strong. He braced himself upon the ground with his left hand—and with his right pulled up the metal mass and rolled from beneath it.

A wave of agony slid over him—but he ground his teeth and clenched his hands and rested, his lungs heaving. After a while breathing became easy—and he grew conscious that the monotonous, incessant noise, so lonely in the surrounding silence, was not inside his head. It was a low-pitched, human voice, repeating something over and over again, at absolutely regular intervals. He thought the sounds were words, but could not be sure.

He tied the coat around his neck, by its sleeves. The main bulk of the hindmost car, upturned and sprawling and surrounded by disordered heaps of its own wreckage, was to his left and further down the hill. The nearest pile was blazing with a happy, crackling flame—and the sight of it showed him what he must do. He must first destroy the coat in the fire and then try to drag himself away.

He began to move, pulling himself along by his hands. The droning, rhythmic voice grew louder, but he still could not distinguish words. He reached the little pile of burning timber and pulled the coat from his neck as he lay and thrust it into the flame. It was dry and the cloth was old and it caught at once and flared smokily while he watched.

He began to move again, dragging himself downhill towards the trees. The trend of the slope was carrying him through the wreckage but he did not care: this way was the easiest. He made agonized but fairly rapid progress until his right leg scraped against a piece of steel debris. The pain was so intense that he was forced to halt progress and struggle to master it.

The voice was close now, and the words it was making stamped themselves into his mind. It was a woman's voice, and it was saying:

"I'm all right, Bob: are you all right, darling? . . . Come and help me, Bob: are you all right,

darling? . . ."

It went on saying that, at exactly the same intervals. It

never varied the spacing or the tone.

Otto lifted his head. He thrust his arms out before him and clutched at the grass and began to drag himself forward again.

"I'm all right, Bob," said the voice. "Are you all right, darling? . . . Come and help me, Bob: are you all right,

darling?"

He writhed on his slow and tortuous way. He traversed another yard or two, now close to the weird, tangled shapes

of the wreckage, before he saw the two children.

They loomed right in his path, so that he would have to make a detour to get around them. They were quite small children, a boy and a girl. The boy seemed to be asleep. He was lying on his side, his cheek pillowed on his hand, but where his legs in their gaily striped pyjama trousers should have been was a viscous, semi-liquid pool. The little girl, her plump thighs rigid, seemed to be trying to stand upon her head—only, as became instantly plain to Otto's wide and staring gaze, she had no head.

"Lieber Gott!" said Otto, and dragged himself around

until his eyes could not see.

"I'm all right, Bob." The voice was quite close to him now: it came from beneath a twisted, tent-like cluster of debris. "Are you all right, darling? . . . Come and help

me, Bob: are you all right, darling?"

Otto stopped suddenly in his downward course. He slewed his body around and dragged it, uphill now, close to the voice, and saw that the tent-like cluster was made of interlocking struts of steel. He peered into their shadow and saw the body of a woman pinned beneath them. The voice was coming from her mouth. He felt around with both hands and found that only one of the

struts was pinning her. He tried to speak to her, to tell her what he was doing, but her words did not change.

"Come and help me, Bob," she said. "Are you all

right, darling?"

Otto dragged himself around until he could seize the strut which held her. He did not seem to be conscious now of the pain in his legs. He could not move them nor use their force—but their existence did not seem to hamper him so much.

He wrapped an arm about the strut and heaved. It moved—and, his teeth sunk in his lower lip until the blood ran down his chin, he raised it from the ground and held it there. He racked his body and stretched in the free arm beneath the steel tangle and caught the woman's shoulder and the stuff of her gown and began to pull her body free. Her voice ceased.

Unbelievably, he dragged her inch by inch from the web—and then, as he pulled her body clear, heard a little rattling sound from throat and knew that she was dead. He tried to ease down the strut he had held above the ground, and the whole structure collapsed.

Something struck him on the back of the head and the world went away from him.

9 LOS ROBLES:

First Phase

THERE was slimy, spinning darkness. Sometimes it was the inmost self which whirled and the darkness which was stationary; sometimes this law, in each case seemingly immutable, was violently reversed.

The self became aware of its body—and he was afraid with a fear which was so terrible as to be exalting. And he began to doubt the darkness: perhaps there was no darkness; perhaps he only thought there was darkness.

The darkness ceased whirling but he remained still. The stillness was more frightful than the movement had

been.

He was Otto Falken and there was a dull ache in his head and agony in his legs. He was Nils Jorgensen—and both his legs were broken. He had been shot down? He had been wounded? He had been injured by a bomb fragment? No—he was Jorgensen. He was in America. But his legs were broken—he knew that. Both his legs. There had been an explosion. . . .

He knew everything—suddenly, in a flash of memory

and comprehension which left his body shaking.

There was softness beneath and around him. The softness of a bed. There was a heavy constraint about his head which was nothing to do with the pain inside it, and his legs were each of them bound and stiffly constricted and immovable in spite of efforts which shot him through with darts of anguish.

He was in a bed and there were bandages around his skull and splints upon his legs—and he could not see. A

cold sweat of fear broke out all over him. He could not see.

He lay very still and thought about his eyes—and found that the muscles in lids and cheeks were stiffly contracted, screwing the eyes tightly shut like those of a child who has been frightened by a vivid light.

Perhaps he could see. Perhaps he was neither blind nor in darkness. Perhaps he had just clamped his eyes shut

like this and failed to order them to open.

He ordered them to open—and nothing happened. He was conscious of the rigidity, as if they were frozen, of the little muscles beneath the skin.

He tried again, and the lids lifted heavily. There was light and he could see it. It was a soft, shaded light and it came from somewhere beyond his range of vision and it did not hurt his eyes.

He could see. Beyond doubt he could see. He saw, directly above him as he lay, a white ceiling divided by thick yet graceful beams of some dark and glowing wood. He saw, below these and at the end of his vision-range, the upper part of a wide, white-framed window, outlining a rectangle of that grey-shot blackness which is forerunner of dawn. He could see.

A little groan of relief came from his lips. He tried to turn upon his side to see yet more—and the moan became a groan, almost a cry, at the pain which the fruitless effort had caused. He lay limply as he was. His lungs laboured as if he had been running and again he felt the sweat cold upon his forehead.

He heard a whisper of movement, and into his vision, at the left side of him as he lay, came a figure. But it was out of his sight immediately, and all he knew was that it

was a woman's.

She stood at the extreme head of the bed, and there was a little rattling of glass or china. He tried to move so that he could see her, but failed by reason of new and breath-taking hurts.

She moved again. She bent over him—and he could see her face.

The most extraordinary thing happened to him then, inside his mind. He knew that he did not know this girl; had never so much as been aware of her existence, whosoever and whatsoever she might be. But he knew, too, as he looked into the dark softness of the wide-set eyes, that here was no stranger. In a blinding flash of that clear and instinctive sanity which may so often and so easily be mistaken for its very antithesis, he knew that his essential and basic self had recognized another.

His eyes widened and he was for a moment oblivious to the pain which had increasingly been flaming through him. For a checked instant of time, the dark eyes widened too and in them he thought he saw reflection of that same momentarily paralysing shock of surprise.

And then she spoke, in a clear, cool young voice which was curiously deep yet had in it no hint of masculinity. She moved a little as she spoke, and the strange, binding spell between their eyes was broken and he saw her for the first time.

She was young, younger than her voice and her eyes: if she had reached her twenties, the accession was recent. She was, perhaps, a little under the middle height of American women but she was lithe and free-moving and slim without angularity. Her hair was smooth and shining. It was unshorn, and it coiled about her proud neat head in a dark soft rope which was like a halo framing from above the oval of her face; an oval whose purity of outline somehow welded into a fascinating and compelling unity features which did not intrinsically fit with one anotherthe wide-set eyes dark and luminous beneath their fine uptilted brows, the charming and memorable and indefinable nose, the strong yet gentle sweep of the jaw, the high cheekbones with the faint suggestion of gauntness in the shadows beneath them, the wide and generous and vivid mouth, upturning at the corners and with a lower lip of delectable fullness.

She said: "Be quiet now. You're all right. But you have to sleep. The doctor left something to make you sleep."

She bent over him and gently lifted his left arm from the sheets and began to push back the sleeve of the silk pyjama coat whose softness he had felt unknowingly.

He tried to see her eyes again, but all that met his gaze was the nape of her neck, soft and smooth and goldentanned beneath the smooth coilings of the gleaming dark hair. He tried to speak, but his lips felt stiff and unwieldy and his tongue seemed awkwardly heavy. He tried again and managed a few creaking words.

"Where . . . is . . . this?" he mumbled.

She said: "You mustn't talk yet. It's all right."

He felt something wet and cold upon the outside of his upper arm and then firm strong fingers which pinched around the cold place and then a stinging little jab.

"There," said the deep young voice. "You'll go to

sleep now."

(ii)

He was in a deep warm pit. It was soft and cloudily comfortable and the only sign of pain in him was memory which made present peace all the more delicious.

He bathed, he wallowed, in the heavenly nothingness.

And then after hours or zons the voices began. They were very quiet at first, little formless rustlings which should have enhanced the delight of this endless irresponsible drowsing like rain upon the roof. Should have but did not—for it became imperative to his mind that he should catch their words, and peace began to slip from him, layer by lovely layer.

The voices grew louder, one at a time, against the for ever rustling background of the others. They rocketed up out of the rustling and hurled their words at his cringing ears and subsided into the obbligato again and were replaced by others. He could not escape them—and the peace was transmuted into a strange hell where he cowered from words as if they were jagged missiles which would bruise and tear his head to pulp.

"This is not work which will bring you public honour!" they screamed at him. "Sale boche!" they screamed—and followed the words with a harsh sound of spitting. "Could you lend me a pencil—it is seventy-one minutes past the hour. . . . I'm all right, Bob: are you all right, darling?" They were endless and relentless. They screamed at him.

"Yer in the fifth bloody column!" they screamed. "I say, could you help me clear this stuff away—my mother's in there!... A bleedin' German masqueroodin' as a Swede!... Come on, Mother—where's your life-belt?... The good old U.S., son—Noo York!... Come and

help me, Bob: are you all right, darling?"

They screamed at him and he could not shut his ears to them nor his memory. He knew each voice, and with the knowledge went exact and vivid memory of its

owner.

"Goering and Churchill and Someone and Mussolini and Henry Armstrong!" they screamed. "Nils, you were wonderful—smile at them!... And there it was, chaps, a German sub!... Much and high appreciation of this wonderful country: it is truly a free land!... An Evil Idea cannot beat a Good Idea!... I'm all right, Bob: are you all right, darling?"

They screamed at him—and they came faster and faster up out of the rustling depths until there was no pause

between them; no surcease. They screamed:

"Turn around so that I can see your profile quick those big doors in the side I'm all right Bob the thirtieth of February is the day are you all right darling you do not know the German language not one single word the F.B.I.'ll be around like ants come and help me Bob where's her life-belt there'll be nothing left of Tipping or Coley or anything all officers in the Mess-Hall in five minutes Derek go up, on deck at once they are not bad you know not the young men you will help to teach them come and help me Bob my mother's in there are you all right darling my mother's in there Bob come and help me my mother's in

there my mother's in there my mother's in there are you

all right my mother's in there"

The mounting torture spurred him to impossible action. With a wild wrenching of every force in mind and body and self he tore free of them. There was fire and the whirling again and he burst through the veil which had held him away from reality and heard a hoarse wordless cry from his own lips.

(iii)

The room, except for the corner in which his bed stood, was flooded with sunshine. There were trees outside the wide white window and in them the birds cheeped and twittered. There was a light slight ghost of a breeze and it came cool into the room with the warm yellow sunshine and made the leaves on the trees dance and gently sway.

He lay absolutely still. His body was wet and shaking and it was difficult to breathe. But he felt relief like a god-sent salve: it flowed over and in and through him and the grinding pain in legs and head and body was constant

and welcome proof of reality.

Through the open window came the warm and thudding and satisfactory sound of a horse's hoofs on turf. Somewhere in the sunlit, invisible distance was a throaty rattling of frogs and the somnolent whirring of a mower. From below this room where he lay came a burst of rich, chuckling laughter and then a throaty, soft-lined voice which shouted words he could not hear but which he knew by the rich and indescribable tonal quality to belong to a coloured woman.

He turned his head with slow and deliberate disregard of the hurt the movement caused him. He looked out at the room for the first time. It was a large room, irregularly shaped—and it was like nothing he had expected nor anything he had ever seen. It had a rich, cool depth of

space and comfort and permanence. It was serene and ageless and graceful, and the furnishings seemed, like the place itself, to belong to no order or plan except their admirable own.

His head hurt and he slowly laid it back upon the soft pillow which smelt evanescently of fresh lavender. He gazed out of the facing window at the sun-dappled, swaying leaves. He heard, from the farther side of the house, the sound of a car as it came to a halt upon a gravel surface and then a man's voice and, answering, the clear, deep young voice which had told him, "You'll go to sleep now"; the clear, deep young voice of the girl about whom he had been afraid to think in case she were an unreality.

He lay and waited. His body was trembling but he heeded neither this nor its pain. He heard feet upon a stairway—and then the slight clicking sound of a doorhandle gently turned and a little, extra stirring of the air in the room, and then, hushed almost to a whisper, her voice.

"I think he's still asleep, doctor," it said.

Otto moistened his lips with his tongue. He was going to speak—and then he would see her again and know whether it had been true, the tremendous, the vital importance of that recognition between them. He was afraid to find out—but he must. He said:

"Please, I am awake," and waited without breathing while the light feet and the heavy approached the bed and then came into his sight.

He saw a man first—and his eyes went past the man and saw her—and he knew that it had been true. The dark eyes flickered over his, barely grazing his steady gaze—but it was enough. He found that his whole body had been taut, but now he relaxed it. He was breathing fast.

The doctor pulled up a chair and sat beside the bed

and peered down at his patient. He said:

"Well, well. Feeling a little more like yourself, I see." He put out a hand and felt for the pulse in Otto's wrist. "You're a very lucky young man—very lucky!"

(iv)

And, after that first waking, after the realization that she was there and was real, time ceased to have its ordinary applications for him. It was not that he was unconscious for long periods, or delirious or drugged or out of his senses, although he may have been, for brief intervals, each and all of these. It was rather that, for him in his illness, time functioned upon a different basis from the normal: the earth went around the sun in vague rotation—but beyond that point ceased all similarity to time as he had known it. He was here, and his body was broken and sick: he was here, and while his body was mending, the dividing-lines of man-made time, those barrier-lines which mark off minutes and hours and days and weeks, all faded into nothingness: instead of a rigidly charted, ever-adding sequence of periods was just a round map of being. Things happened upon this map, haphazard and almost incessantly, but they marked no progression in any mathematical dimension; they were unco-ordinate fillings-in of the blankness of the map; fillings-in which would eventually complete the map and make him whole.

So he lay—and things happened and the fillings-in mounted and added and brought him ever nearer to recovery. But because the pressure of the time-chart had been removed from him, the happenings which made the fillings-in were each an individual problem or excitement or pleasure or suffering: they made no chain; they were unconnected units of Event, objective in the main but

sometimes of his own engineering.

As, for instance, the question of drugs. They wished to give him drugs: they said that drugs would help his recovery by making sleep easier for him. They said this and much more—but he would not take the drugs, after they had once or twice been given to him, because he was afraid.

The fear was two-headed: he was afraid, equally, that

with no command over himself he might in some way betray Nils Jorgensen and the Machine, and he was afraid, with a sick and different fear, of the pictures he might see. The pictures, as he found when they gave him morphia again that first time the doctor came, were worse even than the voices.

To win his fight for no drugs he had to have help, her help. He achieved it simply, by asking her for it. She was sitting in a deep chair by the window which faced the foot of his bed: she was reading, and the light of a shaded lamp cast its soft gold circle downwards and touched bright gleamings from the coiled smooth darkness of her hair.

He spoke—and she set down the book and rose and was beside him in a swift, graceful instant.

And he told her. He said:

"They must not give me drugs. The sleep is not good then." His voice was laboured and the words were slow and heavy with the care of their selection. He said:

"Sleep with the drugs is bad. In my case. I am more

tired after the sleep than before."

He kept his eyes upon her face, but her eyes were guarded. She did not cast them down nor veil them studiedly—but they seemed, without any sign of deliberate avoidance, never to meet his for more than an instant far too short for any revelation. She said:

"I'll tell the doctor," and bent over him and touched his forehead lightly with fingers which were cool and impersonal. His skin was clammily wet with the sweat of horror and he wished that she had not touched it then. She brought him water to drink and straightened the twisted dressings upon his head and gave him a fresh pillow. She said no more than the four words—but there were no more drugs, despite skirmishings with the doctor after certain nights when pain had made it impossible for him to sleep. . . .

That was the first Event-unit of his own making. The second was the matter of reporting himself and his whereabouts to Rudolph Altinger. This must be done—for many reasons it must be done. It was his duty to do it—

and perhaps to do his duty against all difficulty might somehow be a protective charm to ward off the dreams which, even after the cessation of the drugs, were wont to haunt his sleep whenever he least expected them. They were not, mercifully, as bad as the voices or the pictures-but they were bad enough, particularly the one which recurred. This was a fantastic medley made the more frightful by reason of its perpetual hovering upon the edge of farce. It concerned his triumphal return to Germany and the continual emergence, at the most unlikely and never-to-beforeseen times and places, of a small and dark-haired and squarely built figure clad incongruously in a brown woolly bathrobe over which was strapped the clumsy bulk of a cork life-jacket. The small figure's hands were for ever leaving dark stains upon things they touched, and the clipped, precise little voice was for ever championing him to others when there did not seem any need or reason for the implied defence. And it never changed its words: it said, over and over again, whatever the time and place and situation:

"He isn't bad, you know! He's going to teach them that an Evil Idea cannot beat a Good Idea!"

And then he would wake, shaking.

So he communicated with Altinger. He had help, her

help. It was morning. He said:

"Please: could you write a letter for me? To my employer—my boss. He will be wondering what has happened to me."

She was by the wide hearth, with her back to him. She was setting fresh flowers in the vases upon the broad

mantel. She said:

"Of course I will," and set down the flowers and brought pen and paper and sat in the chair beside the bed.

As always now, she contrived to guard her eyes.

He dictated his letter, slowly. Mr. Altinger would have heard of the train-wreck. He had been hurt in the train wreck, so he had been unable to reach Seattle and complete for Mr. Altinger the business about the site for the house of Mr. Blum. He had been hurt considerably—

with a gash in his head and both legs broken—but was recovering well. He was not in a hospital, but a guest in the house of Samaritans who refused to let him be moved.

And so on—stiff and correct and completely beyond any sort of suspicion—provided, of course, that the enemy had no means of proving that he had never been upon the train. And that they had was most highly improbable, since the wreck had been so complete, with so many servants of the railroad company beyond doubt killed.

He had done his duty, anyhow, to the best of his ability—he had notified his commanding officer. He hoped and believed that the charm would work and that the dreams would be banished.

But, strangely, they were not. They grew, instead, worse and more frequent, so that he became haunted not only by the fear and memory of them but also by the revived fear that he might unwittingly betray himself and the Machine. He did not know, although he kept on telling himself that he did, which fear was the worse. He grew afraid of sleep—yet knew that sleep was essential: he was imprisoned in a relentless circle.

But at last he found solution to the problem: he found that if sleep came when she was with him in the room, he dreamed of her or not at all, and was safe.

He said to her:

"Please: I have something to ask you," and she sud denly stopped in what she was doing and stood absolutely still, like a picture of arrested motion. She was sideways to him and he could not see her face. She said:

"What is it?" and her voice was different; it was still and controlled and the words came stiffly. He was alarmed by this difference.

"Please do not be annoyed with me. But there is something you can do; something that will help me. . . . I sound like a child—but I can only sleep rightly if you are here when I begin to sleep."

Her strange stillness broke then. She set down the things she was carrying on the bedside table. She did not look at him, but at what she was doing. She said:

"Oh—I see. All right—don't wony." Her voice wasn't different any more, but deep and cool and clear and perhaps even softer than he had known it.

That was all she said—but he knew that now she would always be with him when sleep was coming. And she was, and he slept nearly always without the dreams. . . .

That was the second Event-unit of his own making, and the last one of any importance. The other, objective fillings-in of the timeless map were many, very many. But he knew them all.

He knew them all. This house was named Los Robles. It was less than ten miles from the Palitos viaduct. Her name was Clare-Clare Ingolls. The doctor's name was Brandt. He had a wound in his head, but the skull was not fractured There were three coloured servants, but the only one he had seen was Lena, who helped to nurse him and was tall and bronze-coloured and Amazonian and very happy. His left shin was broken in one place, his right in three. It was known immediately that the wieck of the train was the work of saboteurs. Los Robles had been built by and belonged to Waldemar Ingolls, the father of Clare. Altinger had received his letter. Altinger was in New York and had telephoned two or three times to ask how he was and tell him not to worry and offered to have him moved to a San Francisco hospital, but the Ingolls had preferred to keep him. This room where he lay was called the big guest-room. He was here because at the sound and news of the wreck the whole scattered community of the countryside had turned out to see and help and there had been a shortage of ambulances in this lonely place and Waldemar Ingolls had found him near the dead woman whom he had pulled out from beneath the wreckage. Clare's mother was not alive. Dr. Brandt was very pleased with his progress. No one had known his name until he had been able to tell them it was Jorgensen: they thought he must somehow have lost his purse or wallet, to have nothing on him at all which gave any clue to his identity Waldemar Ingolls was a tall, lean giant of a man: he had iron-grey hair and a deeply tanned face and hard, direct grey eyes which looked very straight at you and were always softening suddenly and wrinkling at their corners when he smiled or laughed, which was often, but never without reason. Several newspaper reporters had called at the house to see the wreckvictim, but had been turned away. . . .

All this and more he knew—and he knew also that he had not betrayed himself.

10 LOS ROBLES:

Second Phase

Without warning or struggle the time-sense returned to him. At one instant it was not there, at the next the grid-lines of the chart—the lines which ruled life from seconds to centuries—were firmly

superimposed upon his being again.

Propped against his pıllows, he was finishing his first meal of the day, and at the far end of the big room Lena was busy with broom and dustcloths, every now and then a little snatch of tuneful humming would break from her lips, only to be instantly suppressed as a possible source of annovance to the invalid.

Otto stared before him, a frown creasing deeply into

his forehead. He said, turning his head a little:

"Please, how long have I been here?"

He had spoken to Lena many times upon many days before this, and she had answered. But there must have been a new quality in his voice, for she stared at him and ceased her work and came across the room to stand by the bed and look down at him with her hands on her hips and a wondering smile upon her face.

"Landsakes, Mizr Johnson!" she said happily

sure's a powerful lot mended!"

Otto did not understand a word of this. So he smiled up at her and tried again. He said:

"How long have I been here? Is it . . many days?"

Lena concentrated upon this problem. she cast down her eyes and moved her lips, and with a small rustling sound the fingers of both hands beat out rapid scales upon

the sides of her starched apron.

"It's full twenty days, Mizr Johnson. . . . " She retired within herself for further calculation. "No! no, sir! It sure's three weeks to the jot." There was triumphant certainty now in the rich voice. "That's what, Mizr Johnson, sir—three weeks to the jot this evenin' since Mizr Ingolls an' Miz Clare they brung you in."

"Three weeks!" said Otto—and frowned again with amazement and dismay and the effort of relegating all the fillings-in upon the map to their relative places within the

gud-lines of the time-chart.

"Please," he said. "What is the date of the month?

To-day?"

She told him—and continued to stand looking down at him with a widening smile which managed to combine without effort the pleasant emotions of maternal pride, clinical satisfaction, response to male attraction, and broad human sympathy.

"H'mn!" He grunted, and repeated the date and wrestled with his stiffly working mind to discover why the existence of a figure upon the calendar should fill him with

sick foreboding.

And then there came the sound of the door opening and footsteps and the quick, decisive, pleasantly harsh voice of Waldemar Ingolls.

"Morning," it said. "How d'you feel?"

The man himself came into the field of Otto's vision and stood by the foot of the bed. He wore blue jeans and a vividly checkered shirt and the heels of his riding-boots lifted him to an almost giant height. He was lean and erect and sure-moving, and the iron-grey hair above the sharp, tanned face seemed handsomely incongruous until one looked more closely at the face itself and saw that here was a man who, although he had wasted no minute of any, had yet lived through many years.

Otto smiled at him; but Lena spoke. She said:

"Ah was ajest on'y sayin' to Mizr Johnson, Mizr Ingolls, that he sure was amendin' right fast!"

Otto said:

"It is a strange thing, Mr. Ingolls, but I this moment realized that I have not been . . . been . . . " He fumbled for the right phrase, being very careful. "... been aware of Time."

He would have gone on, but was not permitted. The

quick voice said:

"I know what you mean. Exactly. Been that way myself. You're all right up to a point—but healing. So they take Time away from you. It's an intricate device which sick men mustn't fool with." He moved away from the foot of the bed and dropped his length into the chair by the bed and sat forward and scanned Otto's face with the hard grey eyes. They suddenly lifted at the corners and radiated a myriad wrinkles, and the firm lips parted and there was a white flash of teeth between them. He said:

"Yes. You're a whole lot better. New stage nowdefinitely convalescent. Lena, you go on with your work before Miss Clare catches you gossiping."

Lena beamed. "Yezzr," she said happily, and went

back to the far end of the room and the broom and dusters.

Otto said: "Mr. Ingolls, I have to say . . . to express . . ." He hoped that this difficulty with the English tongue—a difficulty which had almost vanished before he was hurt—was only temporary. He tried again, while the grey eyes watched him with a gleam of amusement somewhere in their depths. He said:

"I must tell you that I am so grateful for your . . ."

Ingolls' smile came again, and an interruption.
"That'll be enough," he said. "In the first place it was common humanity—in the second . . ."

He was interrupted in his turn—by the opening of the door, and the voice for which Otto had longed but which now, surprisingly, made him feel fear. It said:

"Oh, hello, Boss! Didn't know you were up here."

"Any rule against it?" Ingolls said—and then, as she came into Otto's sight: "He's a lot better this morning. Convalescent now. You might stop him from trying to pull expressions of gratitude out of his hat, will you?" He smiled at Otto as he spoke and there was no sting in the words.

She stood behind her father's chair, with one hand resting upon its back. She was slim and poised and real with a sort of divine reality which put fantasy to shame. She was dressed in something which was slight and simple and cool and blue and above it the coiled dark hair seemed to gleam with a light of its own.

"Look at him!" said Ingolls. "See what I mean?"

. She looked at him—but somehow, though Otto strove to make them, her eyes did not meet his. She spoke to her father.

"Yes," she said. "Yes. He's...all the way back." She looked towards the other end of the room—and suddenly she smiled and her eyes crinkled at the corners like her father's and the beauty of her mouth stabbed through Otto with a hot, searing pain which was part fear and part delight. She said:

Lena! Remember it's porch-wash day! It's porch-

wash day, Lena!"

There was a clattering of brooms and dustpan, and then Lena's voice, in a cry of alarm, half-genuine, half-seriocomic.

"Landsakes alive, Miz Clare—if ah don't done forgot!"

Ingolls grinned suddenly. He said:

"Don't forget that spiders' nest, Lena. In the corner by

the dining-room windows. Roust 'em out!"

"Mizr Ingolls!" It was a muted shriek, and was immediately followed, by a clattering rush and the closing of the door and a chuckling from the passageway.

"Now," said Clare to her father, "she won't go near

the porch, and John'll have to do it!"

Otto said: "Mr. Ingolls; Miss Ingolls, please you must allow me to express . . ."

"There he goes again!" said Ingolls.

Clare sat upon the arm of his chair. She looked at Otto and smiled and he thought her eyes might stay upon his but they did not. She said:

"He means it. Don't you, Boss? He doesn't-we don't-want to be thanked. There's nothing to thank us for. There isn't really. First of all . . ."

Ingolls put back his head and laughed with an infectious

barking. He said:

"I was giving him that already. Wasn't I, Jorgensen? You remember? First of all, it was common humanity and so on." The laughter died out of his face, but there

remained a taut, wry smile. He said:

"But there's another reason, Jorgensen. You may as well have it now; then perhaps you'll realize you don't have to thank us. That train-wreck was called 'sabotage'—but to me, and to very many others in America, it was more than that—it was an act of war; from a treacherous, underhand enemy who hasn't had the courage to declare himself openly. That makes you, wounded by the enemy, in the same relation to us as an injured R.A.F. pilot would be to any Britisher whose field the boy landed in. Only it's a bit more, even, in our case. It's more than just a plain duty, it's a pleasure as well, because it gives us a feeling that, by patching you up, we're striking a more direct blow against the enemy than we'd be allowed to otherwise in the present situation, which is what a Senator would probably call 'unclarified' if he had to find a word for it."

He paused. The break was rhetorical, and would have been prelude to more had it not been for his

daughter's interpolation.

I think," she said, "there are some soap-boxes in the tool shed. Shall I get one?"

Otto stared, and Ingolls laughed again. He said:

"All right. All right. But you see what I mean, Jorgensen?"

Otto was slow and careful. "Yes. Yes, I am sure I

understand."

He had been too slow. He became aware that Ingolls' grey eyes, hard and intent and unsmiling now, had fixed upon him suddenly.

"Unless, of course," said Ingolls slowly, "you don't sympathize with the viewpoint I've just expressed."

The girl got to her feet. Otto saw her cross to the bookshelves at the other side of the room, but Ingolls appeared not to notice any movement. He kept his eyes

on Otto's face, waiting for an answer.

Otto smiled. "I assure you," he said, "that I am anti-Nazi almost to the point of insanity. At least, that is what my friends have told me." He was on the old familiar ground and, although it seemed strangely distasteful now to gambol upon it, it was firm and solid beneath his feet. He let the smile die and the well-rehearsed gleam of earnest fanaticism replace it. He turned his body towards Ingolls and rested on an elbow. He said:

"I am sorry that you should doubt me, Mr. Ingolls. If you knew me better, you would not." The stiffness of his English was mercifully fading. "I am a Swede, but my father and mother, some years ago, went to Norway. They lived in the region of Naarvik." He heard Clare's light footstep as she came back across the room but he would not let himself so much as glance at her. His eyes must be fixed upon Ingolls' and his voice dry and harsh with suppressed emotions. He said:

"Their house was de . . . demolished by Nazi bombs

-and they were in it!"

There was silence, broken first by a thin, slight rustling of paper, then by Ingolls' voice.

"I'm sorry," said Ingolls. "I wasn't doubting you, as

you call it. I just like to be sure."

But Otto went on, making his voice harsher yet, and

slightly, ever so slightly, broken. He said:

"They were both killed. There was not anything left of them. And there were no soldiers near their house, nor anything which could be in any way mistaken for a military objective. They were both killed." He leaned further towards the man in the chair, half his body out of the bed.

"But perhaps that was better for them," he said. "I am sure that it was better for them. They died—but they are free now. My father would not like to live under a rule which forbids a man even to think his own thoughts."

He laughed suddenly—and it was a wilder sound than

he had intended. His head was hurting him now, and his eyes. But he must finish the work. He thought that Ingolls was about to speak and hurried on before he could. He tried to raise his voice a little more, but somehow miscalculated and heard that he was shouting and went on, not caring.

"It was better, maybe. They were old—they could not fight. But people who are not old must fight—and that is what they must fight for, to keep the right to think as they think, not as others tell them they must think!"

He might have gone on too long, but his head helped him. It suddenly hurt him so much that he was forced to put it back upon the pillow and lie still, his lungs labouring, until the pain died down.

Clare's voice dropped cool and quiet into the rough-

edged silence.

"Waldemar Ingolls," it said, "you are sometimes

awfully dumb!"

Then Otto felt her hand upon his forehead. The pain was fading rapidly now. He held his eyes tight shut for a moment; then suddenly opened them. He was rewarded: the strategy worked, and he caught her eyes with his and hers were not guarded. The clouded veil was not over them, and they could not find any pretext upon which to avert themselves from his and again came the strange and fearful and ecstatic shock of recognition.

She took the hand from his forehead and turned away. She spoke without looking at either man, as she was moving towards the low table which stood behind the bedside chair. Her voice was unhurried, and yet to Otto's ear there was somewhere in it a little vibrant tightness. She said:

"Perhaps I'd better fetch two soap boxes!"

Ingolls took the cue. He laughed, and the tension eased. He saw Otto's look of puzzlement and explained the boxes. He said, after that:

"But I owe you an apology, Jorgensen. . . ."

His daughter interrupted him again. She stood beside him with an opened magazine in her hands, and Otto recognized the red and black cover of Kosmo. He knew what was coming—and instead of relief felt an undefined

but far from pleasant mixture of emotions.

"Look!" said Clare to her father. "Look—and then blush!" Under his nose she had thrust the full-page portrait of the profile of Nils Jorgensen, hero of the Vulcania.

Ingolls muttered something. He sounded startled. He

darted glances from the photograph to Otto. He said:

"Well, I'll be damned!" and wheeled upon his daughter. "Vixen!" he said. "Female jackal! Vipercub! You couldn't, I suppose, have shown me this before? Or told me about it? Or even hinted? No, of course you couldn't—or you wouldn't have had the exquisite pleasure of watching me make a fool of myself! I shall wait for the next full moon and weave a withering spell about you!"

Clare sat herself once more upon the arm of his chair. "Oh, not a withering one," she said. "Anyway, I wasn't sure myself until Dr. Brandt took the last dressing off his head." She looked at Otto. She was smiling, but the eyes were guarded again. She said:

"But why did they take you in profile like that? Why

in the world?"

"I had a black eye," said Otto—and, for no reason that he could lay name to, felt momentarily less oppressed.

(ii)

It was afternoon and he had just eaten and the sun was bright in the trees outside his window. He was alone and he was tired, very tired. He supposed the fatigue must be from the effort he had made this morning; the same effort which had used to amuse him sometimes and sometimes cause him a sort of savage exultation but which this time had filled him with a grey and futile and slimy aching.

He was alone—and he felt sleep wrapping about him.

And she wasn't here with him and it was dangerous to sleep like this because of the dreams. But perhaps they wouldn't come this time. . . .

Sleep took him; heavy and merciless sleep from which

he could not break. . . .

His shoulder was being shaken, very gently, by a small strong hand. It helped him—and he tore himself out of the clinging darkness.

Clare was standing over him. Her face was troubled as he first opened his eyes, but she smiled at once. In his ears an echo of his own voice was ringing.

"Hey!" she was saying. "You'd better wake up.

Wake right up!"

He could still hear the echo of his own voice and wondered desperately what it had been saying—and in which language. He said:

"I am awake now," and tried to smile.

"Bad dreams?" she said, and bent over him so that he could not see her eyes and gently readjusted the tape-fixed dressing which was all now that covered the scar upon his head.

"Yes," he said. "Was I speaking?"

She smiled again. "Shouting's a better word. I couldn't catch more than one phrase, though—one you

kept repeating."

His lips felt dry and he tried to moisten them with his tongue. He forced himself to smile again and strove vainly to remember what the dream had been about and could only recapture a sort of fear which was different from the other fears.

"Perhaps the other words were in Swedish?" He fought to make this seem natural. "It is a language that

sounds . . . strange."

She shook her head. "Oh, no—it was all English. But I could only catch the words of that one phrase. I think you must have been back in childhood. You sounded as if you were trying to explain something you'd done. You kept saying: 'It's true! It's true! 'Or perhaps the word was 'truth'—I'm not sure. And then you'd say, 'I thought

I was saying lies'—I remember that because 'saying lies' is odd—'I thought I was saying lies but they were truths.'" She straightened the bed-covers and sat in the chair.

"Remember now?" she said.

(iii)

It was night and the light on the trees outside was silver instead of gold. It was time, nearly, for him to sleep. He did not want to sleep after the experience of the afternoon. But neither did he want to lie wakeful and thinking. He had been thinking for every lone moment he had had since she had told him the words he had been saying in his dream.

He still could not remember the dream but only the fear and doubt and black anxiety of it. But that did not matter. It was the thought behind those words which mattered and the inescapable truth of the thought. He must face it now.

He faced it—and was none the better. His mind raced, and doubled upon its tracks and raced again. And there seemed no goal reached or reachable. But the thought was still there—and the fact and truth of the thought: he had been trumpeting truth while so blinded that he had thought himself vomiting falsehood. And the last of his lies had pierced through his own mind and impaled him like a collector's moth—"... to keep the right to think as they think, not as other people tell them they must think!"

That was true. There was no escape: it was true. Men, to be higher than the animals, must think their own thoughts, and out of their collective thought must inevitably come, in the last analysis, the only form of rule which was right. Two and two make four. Ice freezes and fire burns. The only ruler of any grouping of men must be the Highest Common Factor of all the minds in that grouping, not an arbitrary algebraic symbol which poses itself as

the master of other minds. Black is black and white unalterably white—and Truth, even when disguised as falsity, must always be Truth. . . .

His mind raced—and he groaned and twisted his body about until his legs hurt in the clumsy casts and he was drenched with sweat. His mind raced—and brought no solution of the appalling problem which was facing him. . . .

(iv)

Clare came into the room.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Did you think I was never coming?"

And then she saw his face, and the lightness went from her voice and she stood looking down at him with shocked and anxious eyes.

He was going to speak—but she moved, going away from him towards the wall-cupboard where were kept all the paraphernalia of nursing. He turned his head to watch her and the grace of her body and movement brought a swift constriction to his throat. She wore a long dress of some filmy, glittering stuff which was blue and silver and floated about her.

She came back to the bedside and moved the chair closer and sat in it and leaned towards him. Against the gleaming stuff of the dress her neck and shoulders glowed softly. There was a little shining metal case between her fingers and she was unscrewing its cap. She said:

"If you have any fever, we must call the doctor. At once. I'm worried about you."

He would not let her finish. He caught at her hand and she stared at him suddenly with wide eyes which were afraid.

She set the thermometer down upon the low table and looked carefully at what she was doing.

He said: "Please, we should talk about us . . ." and was interrupted.

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"No," she said. "No!" She did not struggle to free the hand but let it lie still in his. She said:

"It's . . . it's too soon."

He suddenly knew that his grip was too tight upon her fingers and relaxed it. He stared at her in silence. She raised her head and looked at him but not into his eyes. She said, very low:

"Don't you understand? It's too soon to talk. I... I'm not lying—or being evasive—or being... being..." Her voice broke a little. She said:

"I'm not evading! But it's too soon!"

He felt a sudden but more peaceful weakness. He said at last:

"I understand," and laid his head back upon the pillow and closed his eyes.

After a while she moved her hand, gently and experimentally, and he let his open, lax and inert. He breathed deeply and turned his head away from her so that his face was in shadow. There was no sound or movement for a long time, but he went on feigning sleep. . . .

(v)

She was gone—and he did not have to pretend any longer.

He found passivity unendurable and reached out to the

bedside table for matches and a cigarette.

The tobacco tasted bitter and unpleasing, but he smoked determinedly. He must not sleep—and he dared not yet let his mind go racing again around the mad whirliging of his dilemma.

He thought of Clare—and had reached a sort of desperately excited peace when he stumbled, unaware, over a memory. The sweat burst out cold upon his forehead and he sat suddenly and violently upright.

He had discovered why the date—the newly found and

realizable date of the month—had filled him this morning with formless foreboding.

It was the date of the fifth 'attack' in Altinger's chain! And, by this time, it was already fact—and the giant unbelievable fires were leaping up to the sky unquenchable, and in the hell around their feet were the charred and twisted and crumbling remains of men's work and minds and bodies, of men's women and children and little homes. . . .

(vi)

Outside the windows, the velvet, silver-shot blackness began to thin: it grew grey and the silver paled to blend with the greyness and lose its beauty. There were faint stirrings in the trees and a sudden pre-dawn chill was in the air.

He shivered. He lay flat and motionless and stared upwards with wide-open eyes which saw nothing. All his body was trembling, but he was not conscious of his body. All his mind was a pulsating, flaming question—what shall I do? . . .

The chill went from the air and the stirrings in the trees changed into lusty, full-throated singing and the greyness became transmuted into gold—and Otto Falken, with a sudden access of strength, fought with his rebellious mind and once more was in command of it.

He knew that he must find an answer—the answer. He had known that all the time, but now he knew more; he knew that without sleep and the healing of his body no answer which was right would come.

He had to fight for the mastery—but at last he slept.

(vii)

When he waked the sun was high. Lena stood by his bed and looked down at him with a smile which seemed hampered by some inner anxiety. He stretched himself and answered the smile. He felt better than he had expected to feel. Lena said:

"We were sure awonderin' when you'd be wakin', Mizr

Johnson. We was right worried, Miz Clare an' me! "

He kept the smile on his face—and carefully did not look at the folded morning paper which lay upon the bed-side table. He said:

"Did you think I was dead in my sleep?" and was relieved by the throaty chuckling which told him the

laboured jest had at least seemed natural.

"Why, Mizr Johnson!" The chuckling went on through this; then was turned off at an unseen faucet. "No, Mizr Johnson, what's been atroublin' me an' Miz Clare's your frien' that's comin'. An' before your breakfast an' washin' up too if we ain't mighty careful!"

It was Altinger. He had telephoned from Fresno. He was breakfasting there and would like to detour on his way to San Francisco and see Mr. Jorgensen if that were con-

venient to Mr. Jorgensen's hosts.

He gathered this much from Lena—and let himself be quickly washed and fed and waited for Clare and any more news he could gather from her. But she had not come before Lena left him, and, alone, he reached out an apprehensive hand for the newspaper and unfolded it and braced himself to meet what was there.

It covered the front page. The headlines screamed at

him, huge and black.

Texas Disaster!' they roared. 'Frightful Fire Rages. . . . Explosion Causes Havoc . . . Flames Two Hundred Feet High. . . . Countless Lives Lost in Refinery Holocaust. . . Rumoured Sabotage. . . Washington Sends Aid. . . .'

He heard a quick light footstep outside his room and hurriedly folded the paper and was going to thrust it out

of sight, but was too late.

She said: "I was going to tell Lena not to bring that to you." She was looking at the crumpled paper. "It's . . . unthinkable!" She was speaking faster than usual,

and her voice was taut. Beneath its golden tan her face showed pallor, and there were faint, dark lines beneath her

eyes. She said:

"I suppose Lena told you—your Mr. Altinger called from Fresno. He wanted to drive by and see you. You weren't awake, so I said to come. I hope that was all right?"

He could see that she had not slept, and a compassion

he had never known moved in him He said:

"Yes. Yes, of course. That was quite right. I . . . I

am sorry that I give you this trouble. I..."

She smiled at him. "Don't be meek," she said. She busied herself about the room and spoke as she moved. "I thought you were going to have a relapse last night. But you look better." Her voice was elaborately matter-of-fact. "Would you like us to give your friends lunch?"

His aching mind seized upon the plural word. "Friends? He has others with him?" His voice was sharper than he knew, and she turned momentarily to look

at him.

"I gathered he had." She spoke with her back to him again "He said 'we' all the time, so he can't be alone."

(viii)

He was not There were two others with him. In her father's absence Clare received them. Above, Otto could hear voices and knew that Altinger was not alone, but could not tell who were his companions until they were shepherded upstairs by Lena and shown in to him. He had braced himself for the meeting, but was taken shockingly aback by the utterly unexpected presence of Carolyn Van Teller. He hardly noticed that the third of his visitors was the ancient, improbable Gunnar Bjornstrom, to whom, in the room of the Mark Hopkins, he had made his first report on Altinger.

Altinger was all spasmodic, breezy kindness, Bjornstrom

was placidly benign—and the woman was gracious and sympathetic and more strikingly beautiful than he had remembered her. She was also—and it increased somehow his fear and distress and confusion—faintly and personally

proprietorial.

'Nice place! " said Altinger. "Nice place! " He was not still a moment, walking up and down and around the room, looking at books, glancing out of the windows, inspecting furnishing and ornament with quick and knowledgeable glances. "You had a lucky landing young Jorgensen!"

'They say you are mending rapidly?" asked

Bjornstrom, and took a delicate pinch of snuff.

"Nils, my poor boy!" said Carolyn Van Teller from the chair by the bed. "You must have had a simply dreadful time! '

Otto felt a dull, sick aching in his stomach: the newspaper, neatly folded now, lay upon the table near his hand. He could not see the headlines, nor the pictures which he knew would be upon the inner pages—but he could feel them. He said:

"Yes, I was very lucky. . . . I think that is right, Mr. Bjornstrom. . . . It was bad, yes. But it might have been worse,"

Altinger was standing in the bay window now, staring out through the trees. He drew a deep breath of the soft air and exhaled it noisily. He said:

"Great country! Wonderful country!"

"God's country," said old Bjornstrom—and suddenly,

dreadfully, giggled.

"These people have been good to you, Nils?" Carolyn Van Teller took a cigarette from her case and lit it and watched him through the smoke.

"Yes," Otto said. "Yes. Very good." He had himself well in hand now, and his tone was correct—neither flat

nor enthusiastic.

Altinger crossed the room with his lunging walk and stood by the foot of the bed.

"How long before you're fit for work?" he said. "We

miss you. You've done a good job. Too bad you got yourself involved in that smash-up."

Old Bjornstrom giggled again, and Carolyn Van Teller

said: "Gunnar! You're like a child!"

The old man took out his snuff-box and was silent.

Otto was increasingly conscious of the sick aching in his stomach. He had to do something, anything to break the spell of growing horror which, if he lay inert and let it, would betray him. He reached out an arm, with a gesture whose violence he tried desperately to conceal, towards the table beside the bed. His hand, groping for cigarettes, struck against the folded newspaper and sent it toppling to the floor, carrying with it the little vase of flowers which just now Clare had set there.

"Clumsy!" said Carolyn Van Teller, and smiled at

him.

"Oops there!" said Altinger, and came quickly to retrieve.

"Tsk-tsk!" From his chair, old Bjornstrom made dis-

tressful clucking noises. "Too bad, too bad!"

Otto closed his eyes. He was suddenly afraid that one of them—that the woman—would see the hatred which was bubbling inside him. And he must not let it show. He had not known how violent it would be. He must not let it show. He felt the woman lean nearer to him, and her hand gentle upon his arm. She said:

"Headache?" Her voice was very low. "Poor Nils!"

"There!" said Altinger, and set the vase back upon the table and rubbed the spilt water from it into the thickness of the carpet with his shoe.

Otto opened his eyes: he was ready. He looked at Carolyn Van Teller and smiled. He said, as if he had forgotten there were others in the room:

"Your hair is beautiful. I had forgotten."

She looked at him and her eyes were soft. Altinger stooped to pick up the newspaper and as he did so it came open in his hand and the black headlines stared out. He said:

"Amazing thing, that Texas oil fire! Can't under-

stand it!" His tone, natural enough to pass muster with any outsider, rang in Otto's ears with a deep and selflaudatory undertone of triumph.

"A dreadful thing!" said Bjornstrom. His squeaky

voice was hushed but the faded eyes were bright.
"Why talk about it, then?" The woman's voice was imperious, and all three men looked at her and were silent. She picked her handbag from the table and opened it. She said:

"We must be moving on-mustn't we, Rudolph?"

Altinger looked at his watch and uttered a sound of surprise which was very slightly overdone. He was resent-

ing an order, however much disguised. He said:

"I'd no idea it was so late!" He moved nearer to the bed and leaned over it, holding out his hand to Otto. "Well-so long, young Jorgensen, hurry and come back to the office: business is booming!"

Otto took the hand and managed to shake it limply.

He said:

"Thank you for the visiting." He knew he should say more and covered up his search for words by a pretence at weakness, closing his eyes for a moment. "I will be back at work soon," he said at last.

"That is good!" said Bjornstrom. He had heaved himself slowly out of his chair and was approaching the bed. Otto was forced to shake his hand too. It felt dry

and old and brittle.

Carolyn Van Teller stood up. She looked very tall, seeming to tower over the men. She laid a small, gaily tied package upon the bed near Otto's hand and then took the hand in both of her own. Bjornstrom moved away a little and Altinger completely: Otto could see neither of them She said to Otto:

"I didn't know what to bring you. And then I saw a

box of the cigarettes you used to like."

Otto picked up the package as if with effort: he must keep up the pretence of weakness and then perhaps he might be rid of them before he betrayed himself. He said:

"Thank you!" He kept his words and tone natural,

but produced a private message with his eyes which he

prayed would pass muster.

"That was very . . . nice," he said, and had an answer from her eyes—and then was horrified beyond reason by the sounds of an opening door and the voice of Clare.

"Forgive me," she was saying, "but I wanted to know when you would all like lunch. It was rude of me: I

forgot to ask you before."

Otto turned his head a little and saw Clare. She stood between Altinger and Bjornstrom, but she was looking at the other woman, as manners demanded. She was poised and cool and in command of herself. She was smiling and very courteous, but it seemed to Otto that there was a tension in her which he had not felt before.

Carolyn Van Teller was smiling too. She seemed taller even than before. She was very gracious. She was charming. She said:

"That's very kind of you, Miss Ingolls, but we really must be going on our way. Mr. Altinger has an important engagement in San Francisco. And so have I."

"Are you sure?" Clare said. She was smiling still. "It would be no trouble—and we could be ready in just a

few minutes."

Altinger put in his word. Otto could see his resentment, invisible except to those who had studied him, of any suggestion that there were other wishes than his. He said:

"It's too bad, Miss . . . Miss Ingolls! But there it is. I have to be in San Francisco this afternoon." He waved a cheerful hand towards the bed. "With your patient

away, I have double duties."

Carolyn Van Teller had turned back to Otto. She sat in the chair again, but poised upon its edge as one who is going to rise immediately. She leaned close to him. She said: "Don't forget to smoke your cigarettes—and smoke all of them yourself."

He knew then that there was something more to the

package than appeared. He said:

"Of course." I will open them now—at once. No one

149 else would like them anyhow," and managed a laugh. He could not see Clare, but he knew that she had momentarily turned her head towards him and then as quickly looked away.

He could hear voices behind him, and then Bjornstrom

"I have no appointment, my dear young lady. I can only regret that neither have I a car. If I had, you would

surely have one guest for lunch."

And then there was a general bustle of going and goodbyes and a last look from Carolyn Van Teller and no sight of Clare and then Altinger again and yet another handshake and Altinger's loud laugh as he said, for all the world to hear:

"And don't go talking in your sleep, young Jorgensen.

You might give away all the firm's plans."

So they had thought of that. Of course they had thought of that! They had been worried seriously. But now they knew it was all right and this talk of Altinger's was half-joke, half-warning to continue caution.

He grinned up at Altinger and then, brave in the knowledge that he had come through this ordeal with colours

high, risked a final stroke. He winked.

Altinger grinned, patted him on the shoulder and was

gone. The door closed softly and Otto was alone again.

He threw back the bedcovers from his body and breathed deeply, trying to rid himself of the dark feeling of nausea. He lay inert and breathed with a slow deep rhythm. He kept raising his hands and looking at them. When they did not tremble any more, he picked up the gaily wrapped package and tore the paper from it and revealed a box of cigarettes. The seal was over the edge of the box intact, but it seemed to break easily, sliding away as if the gum upon it were new.

It was as he expected. Beneath the cigarettes, at the very bottom of the box, was a wafer-thin, once-folded slip of paper. He unfolded it and found writing which read,

"Before you return to work, phone me N.Y."

That was all-and nothing, really, at which the most

suspicious official eye could cavil. But it was signed with an initial which had beneath it a dashing little twirl showing this to be an order of the first importance.

He looked at the paper. It was very thin, and no larger than the sheath of a cigarette. He crushed it into a little pellet and put it into his mouth and swallowed it.

And he went to sleep again.

11 LOS ROBLES:

Final Phase

The days passed, and the nights, and he kept to his purpose. He ate and slept and rigidly kept his mind from futile maelstrom-racing and in everything obeyed the doctor's orders: he even invented exercises for the unhurt muscles of his torso and carried them out with secrecy and grew nearer to health and wholeness

at astonishing pace.

But he did not tell Clare that now he could sleep at any time he wished and without fear of dreams. He did not tell her this because, if he did, she would not sit with him every night until either he slept or pretended to sleep. There was a constraint between them now: it had begun after the visitors had left, and it had progressed increasingly as his determination for utter recovery grew with each day more iron-clad. He knew it was there and he knew that it hurt her as it was hurting him. But he steeled himself to disregard it until the answer should come to him. Until he had the answer, he was not living, and until he lived he must not have dealings with any matter so vital to him as Clare. He tried to explain it to her once, without explaining. He said:

"If I seem strange, it is because I am in . . . in a sort of . . . of . . ." The words were difficult to find. "In a sort of shell. That is while I am growing well. Then I

can . . . can put the shell away."

It did not seem to interest her much. She said she understood—and that was as far as it went, except that he had for the first time a vague thought, too nebulous to be

termed suspicion, that perhaps the constraint was not entirely of his own causing.

But he dismissed the thought—and sank wholly back within the armoured shell again and inside it went on mending.

Dr. Brandt was delighted, and made no secret of his amazement.

"Wonderful specimen!" he said to Ingolls. "Wonderful physique! And hard! We don't breed 'em that hard over here, more's the pity in these days! Ninety-five men out of a hundred would've died with what that lad took. And just look at him!"

That was the day before they cut the casts off his legs and found them in far better condition than they had hoped. They gave him metal splints then, and in a few days yet lighter ones in which presently, so the doctor said, he could even walk a little.

He smiled at the doctor and said nothing—but within ten minutes of Brandt's leaving there came to Lena's ears, as she worked in the living-room below, a curious shuffling, bumping sound from above her head. She sped up the stairs and arrived, breathless, to find her Mizr Johnson incredibly out of bed and upon his feet and in the middle of the room. He was holding to the back of a chair—and, as she squealed in horrified amazement, he grinned at her, as she told afterwards, "f'm year to year, like a child among a melon-patch!"

In two more days he went down the stairs for the first time. He was helped by the balusters and a stick, impeded by the hoverings of Clare and Lena and John the 'outside man' and even Waldemar Ingolls himself. But he was sure and careful, and in two more days was making the slow journey, both up and down, with none worrying about his safety.

The constraint between himself and Clare grew worse now that he was a freer agent. Perhaps, although they were both wary, it was noted by others; perhaps not. There was no way to tell—and with the conviction growing daily stronger that he would soon be in a condition to face himself with the problem and determine the answer to it, he took no trouble to find out. He was coming, gradually, out of the shell. He knew that—and waited. The signs were various, but first among them was the reaction which he felt to mention of the Texas oil disaster. He had made himself numb at first, and successfully, but now, as he hobbled on walking-splints and stick about the house and listened three times at least a day to the vehemence of Waldemar Ingolls, his torment grew and he began, however sternly he ordered his mind not to dwell upon it, to think about Altinger's Plan Six, due now in less than eight short weeks; the Sixth 'Attack,' beside which all others would pale into third-rate insignificance. When he thought of this he sweated, and even, once or twice, was persuaded by emotion to wrestle with the problem, while knowing that yet he was not ready. . . .

(ii)

Then there arrived, utterly without warning, the night which was to mark the end of waiting and indecision and retreat within armour. A fantastic, undreamt-of, incredible

night.

Clare was out with friends, and Otto and Waldemar Ingolls dined alone. They enjoyed the food and drank more wine with it than usual and Ingolls did most of the talking. But it was good talk—and Otto found, with a sudden amazement, that he was actively and pleasantly aware of immediate existence: the shell had broken and been pulled away.

Ingolls did a strange thing. He looked suddenly at Otto across the table, and he suddenly smiled, and he

said:

"So the chrysalis has cracked! We will now proceed

to get very slightly drunk."

Otto stared but said nothing. He only half-understood the words and was not sure enough of their astonishing implication. He studied the other man covertly, and saw him, despite his age, erect and strong and happy; vigorous and with a life as full as he made it, commanding and vital and intelligent, with a quality about him at the same time unfathomable and familiar.

"Yes," said Ingolls firmly. "Very slightly, and very decorously, drunk."

He gave an order to Lena and led the way into the room which he called library and everyone else in the house his study. It was a very pleasant place: all the southern wall was windows through which the garden and the oaks beyond it seemed impossibly to give ever-changing vistas; there were books from floor to ceiling; there were watercolours of ships and a lovely head in oils of Clare as a child; there were deep chairs of leather and the biggest writingtable Otto had ever seen; there were pipe-racks and cigars and a sheep-dog which lay before the hearth and ashtrays everywhere within reach and a single silver bowl of roses and two inkwells made of gold-mounted horses' hoofs. And now there was Lena with a tray which bore bubble-goblets and a strangely shaped bottle: she set it down upon a table near Ingolls' chair and then turned quickly to hover solicitous about Otto as he set down his stick and lowered himself into another great chair and carefully arranged his legs before him, the jointed splints clanking weirdly beneath his trousers.

And then Lena was gone and Ingolls was pouring great golden splashes into the goblets. He smiled at Otto and they drank after warming the smooth glass in their palms, and Ingolls began to talk again and Otto listened carefully, but was conscious all the while that the time of healing was over and that he could now, so soon as he was alone, begin work upon the finding of the answer.

Ingolls was talking about his work, and the talk was of interest and Otto was conscious that he was glad of the respite which was being forced upon him; glad to enjoy this hour when he must not think of his problem; glad that he was here in this place with this man; glad of the brandy; glad to glance every once in a while at the picture of the

child Clare; glad to pretend for this little time that he was what Ingolls thought him to be. He said:

"I know that your work is . . . is in connection with

the farmers, but I do not know exactly what it is."

Ingolls laughed. He stood up and lifted the bottle and poured more into the glasses. On the hearth, the dog lifted its head and followed him with its eyes and then, satisfied, put the head down again.

"I'll tell you what we call it," Ingolls said. "It's resounding. We call it Advisory Agricultural Expert—or

rather, I do."

Otto sipped at his brandy. He said, slowly:

"Advisory Agricultural Expert." He savoured the last word: all of his training made it impressive. "You must have studied for a long time the . . . the scientific aspects of the business of farming."

Again Ingolls laughed. He said:

"You make it sound very important. And very difficult. It isn't. It's a technical profession, and quite a lot of fun because there aren't many people in it yet and I manage, with a lot of clients and a couple of patents and some Government work, to make quite a bit of money at it. Have some brandy?"

He poured more into Otto's glass and then his own. He was feeling, very evidently, well pleased with life and

Otto and himself.

Otto said: "You have done this . . . this agricultural work since you were a young man?" He was very careful with his words. He was feeling the liquor and was glad of the sensation. He was also genuinely interested, the way he always had been in other men's lives if these were active.

Ingolls was tilting his goblet. He said, when he set it

down:

"I was born in a farming country. Then I left it for a while. Then I came back to it. Drink up, man; you're very slow." He stood suddenly and crossed to a far corner of the room. The dog lifted its head again and watched him. He opened a cupboard below the book-shelves and found an album of recordings and busied himself with the radio cabinet and in a moment there was music filling the quietness of the room; the gay, romantically martial music of Offenbach as welded and blended for the ballet called Gaité Parisienne.

Otto forgot about farming. He swayed his glass in time to the vivid opening and then drank and then kept the beat with head and hand as the carefree, toy-soldier chorus slid into the sabre-swinging sweetness of the next melody, irresistibly calling to a man's mind a wish-picture of himself, having conquered worlds, laying them at the feet of a maiden who could safely be depended upon to return them accompanied by her own delightful person.

The dog lowered its head and slept again as Ingolls came back. He lifted the bottle again and looked across at Otto with raised eyebrows and a smile and then did not want for any yes or no but poured a bigger libation than any. The music went on, alternately militant and romantic, bacchanal and nostalgic, but always and inevitably gay

and courageous and inspiriting.

Ingolls said: "That's music. It does things to you! They say it's just operetta stuff—but it fills you with all the sort of ridiculous, lovely thoughts you haven't had since you were a boy and the world was a damned sight better place to live in. By God, it makes you want to go back, not so much to your own boyhood as your grandfather's!" His dark eyes were glittering and there was a half-smile at the corners of his strong mouth and his body was as straight as that of the boy he was dreaming of. He said:

"Jacques Offenbach! D'you know what his blood was? He was a German Jew. That always strikes me as peculiarly illustrative of something or the other which I

can't remember just now. Have another drink?"

The music ceased for a moment. There was a soft mechanical whirring as the record changed, and then began the second of the four parts and the room was refilled with melody.

Otto's head was buzzing, slightly and delightfully. He drank from the great glass again and smiled up at his host. But Ingolls was not looking at him; he was standing with

his head half-turned towards the music. There was the most extraordinary expression, Otto suddenly realized,

upon his face. He said, to no one:

"Dolmans and dress-spurs and busbies carried underneath your arm. . . . And war was brutal but with a gentleman's brutality. . . ." He lifted his glass and did not sip at it but drained it and then poured more into it and still did not look at Otto. He crossed towards the machine and lifted its lid as if to cut off the music and then seemed to change his mind and closed it again. The dog got to its feet and padded across the room and thrust its nose into his hand.

The record came to an end—and in the little interval of its changing Ingolls spoke. He said, in a voice which

brought Otto out of reverie with a shock:

"I'll give you a toast, Jorgensen. Drink it with me if you can. It's a toast to my country." He raised his glass: his face was set in hard, grooved lines and he was an old man. He said:

"To the loveliest land of them all—to my country—to Germany!"

(iii)

He said:

"I mean the land and not its present rulers, nor the robot-parrots they have made from children. I mean the quiet, lovely country and the men and women it breeds if

you leave them alone. . . .

"Ingolls is only half the name I was born with. My name was Walter Bruno Waldemar von Ingolstadt. I was a soldier. During the war of '14-'18 I was first a Colonel, then a Brigade Commander, then at the head of a Division. I was the youngest Divisional Commander in the armies of the Kaiser. I was on the Russian front for a little while, but mostly in Belgium and France. I had a good division. In it there were fifteen thousand officers and men—and two senses of humour, mine and the staff cook's. . . .

"Germany went rotten—from the inside, at the top. That is the way she always goes rotten, and it is because in the main her people are a grave, simple people who are the most credulous and trusting in the world and instinctively give their support and obedience to anyone who tells them, rudely and violently and constantly enough, that he is their proper ruler. Such a man used to need blue blood until aristocracy went out of fashion, and now he must have none. But the principle remains the same. It is perhaps due to a national lack of any sense of proportion, which is perhaps the same thing as a lack of humour. . . .

"Germany went rotten and the war stopped. It was a mistake in the first place. But when it was over the victors made a series of far, far worse mistakes. They wanted no more war—and were misguided enough as to impose the very sort of conditions upon Germany which would ensure, sooner or later, the rapid virus-breeding of a fresh war spirit, a naturally revengeful, turn-of-the-worm-and-tables spirit all blooming and ready after a very few years to be taken hold of by the first power-hungry loud-

mouth who happened to come along. . . .

"So he came along—and most decent Germans were either destroyed or ran away or became converted and no longer decent. I myself was already away. I was here, in America. I came here immediately after the last war finished, as soon as I saw what economic conditions were going to be in Germany. There was nothing left of my lands and property, nothing worth having—and although I was tough and hard, my wife was not. She was a gentle person, and I could not face the thought of her fighting through the years of misery and starvation which I knew were ahead.

"So I came here, to America. I had nothing, and I was forty-three years old. But I was strong and free here and could use my body and brains. Farming was in my blood as much or more than soldiering. My family's land in Bavaria was farm land, and for a long time the head of the family had also been the feudal head of three hundred farmers and the master farmer of them all. . . .

"I stayed here, and made enough money, and my wife died in childbirth and I brought up my daughter. I was still a German at heart and even in nationality. And then, in the early '30's, I went back—ostensibly on business, but really to see whether what I had been hearing about the New Party was true; to see, in fact, whether I could not become a real German again, living and working in Germany.

"But what I found brought me back quickly to this country once more and made me become, as fast as I could, an American. I am only a German now with my body which was born in Germany. In law and in my head I am an American—but that does not stop me from being sad about Germany—or from hating the cretinous megalomaniacs who rule her and who are storing up against her such vast batteries of hatred that she may never have a chance again to be her easy and beautiful and rather stupid self. . . .

"I used sometimes to feel that I had been a coward and lacking in duty to run away from Germany that second time instead of staying with her and being one more right-thinking German to oppose the new and rabid power. But I do not think that I was: the power was too powerful, and too rabid, to be opposed without at least an equal force. It is so powerful that it will have to be destroyed, in the very end, by a steady opposition from without which will not so much defeat it as give time for it to be defeated by the increasing velocity of its own hysteric, unreal momentum. . . .

"I had two friends who stayed. One of them was won over by the hysteria and now is a madman himself. The other tried to fight them. They broke him into shattered, jarring pieces beneath the outside husk. They 'questioned' him. For a long time. And again and again. And finally, through some political misunderstanding, they released him and threw what was left of him away and it was possible for friends to smuggle him out of the country. He is in America now. He is not more than two hundred miles from this house, in the kind of 'sanatorium' that should properly be called a lunatic asylum. I say 'he'—but the thing I saw is not a man, even structurally. . . .

"And I say that my way was the better—for in this war,

at last and for the first time in history, it seems to me that the issue has gone beyond the somewhat adolescent exhibition of team-spirit which we call patriotism and has become one of ideology: that at last, and after centuries of pretending, all the men in the world are divided into two camps and are fighting, not for this religion or that piece of ground or the other lump of gold, but for their beliefs in the matter of how Man shall govern and conduct himself. . . .

"So I am glad that I didn't stay with him and fight uselessly and become, because I was defeated, an asset to them instead of a danger. I am glad that I came here to this old land which is new for men and swore allegiance to it. I am glad because, in doing so, I have sworn allegiance to a way of life and thought which, however much it may have become obscured and overlaid by pettiness of thought and doing in peaceful times, is beginning to show stronger and clearer with every day of this strife. . . .

"I am too old to fight as a soldier—but I am not too old to fight, and I tell you that every man or woman or child, whether or not a member of any organized body or army, who lives his life here and thinks his own free thoughts and carries on his work and is opposed in everything he does to any form of tyranny—I say that that one is fighting, is at least a part of the right, slow, deep-rooted force which will stem the wrong, wild force at last and make it destroy itself.

"But every man must be at least something of a sentimentalist—and while I hate the present rulers and doctrines of my first country with a far greater hate than would be possible to any man of any other nationality, I still give you the toast of Germany. To the Germany of green, fat fields and slow, winding rivers; the Germany of Beethoven and Blücher; of Rhenish wine and Wagner; of Württemberg and the Black Forest; of Grimm and Handel and Frederick's Hussars; of my father and my mother and my wife. . . ."

(iv)

Otto said:

"I will drink to that Germany with you."

He put his hands upon the broad arms of his chair and raised himself and stood upright and tottered a little and then arranged his cumbersome legs and rested one hand upon the back of another chair while Ingolls watched him and did not make the mistake of offering help.

They raised their glasses and drank. The room was very quiet and through the windows, as an underline to

silence, drifted the croaking chorus of the frogs.

They set down their glasses, and the dog by Ingolls' side padded softly back to his place upon the hearth and lay.

And Otto climbed the stairs to his room. He was in bed when he heard the sound of Clare's returning car—but when she came softly in, he feigned deep and untroubled sleep.

He had the answer to his problem now. He knew what he must do—but the manner of his doing it must be plotted. . . .

(v)

He slept for only four hours, but when he waked Lena had already finished her work about the room and it was nearing eleven. He dragged himself from the bed and bathed and shaved and clothed himself and was finished with his breakfast when Clare paid her morning visit.

She looked at him with a smile which seemed careful, and her eyes did not meet his for more than an instant.

She said:

"You look all right. How d'you feel?" Her voice was determinedly light, and Otto realized, without remembering, that it must have been this way now for many days.

He said: "I am very well. Fine!" and tried to make her look at him, but failed.

"I've been talking to my parent," she said. "He has a hangover." She was busy with a cigarette box upon the

mantel now, checking its contents.

Otto levered himself to his feet. He stood upon the splints without swaying and made up his mind and moved forward, for the first time, without his stick. She wheeled as he moved and her eyes widened in sudden alarm. She said:

"Oh, be careful!" and came forward as if to support him and then backed away a step as she found him close to her and holding with one hand to the mantel-shelf. He said:

"I am all right! Quite all right. I have been . . . strange, I know—but that is over now. I . . . there was a . . . a thing which was worrying my mind. A problem which I did not know how to deal with. But I know now. I wished to tell you that."

She said: "I don't know what on earth you're talking

about," and still did not meet his eyes.

"I am well now," he said. "And I know the answer to my problem and I will tell it to you soon. To you and your father. But before—now—there is this."

He took her by the shoulder with his free hand. Beneath the thin silk of her blouse her flesh was firm and

alive and coolly waim.

She looked at him now, into his eyes. She looked as if she were afraid, but she did not drop her gaze, and in her eyes he saw again the recognition.

He was very close to her, towering above her. His grip was strong upon her shoulder and it seemed that the blood which was coursing through her body was flowing into his body through his hand.

He lowered his head and she tilted her head back and their mouths touched and a bright flame, bliss and agony

inextricably blended, transfixed him.

His eyes closed and he swayed. He steadied himself and opened them again and she was gone. He looked down in amazement at the hand which had held her; it felt as if it were still touching her.

(vi)

He told them after dinner that night. She and her father sat by the open french windows of the long, low-ceilinged living-room and he came in to them and stood rather stiffly to face them both, braced upon his stick. Ingolls started to say something—and then saw his face and was silent, and Clare drew in her breath with a small, startled, sibilant sound. He said:

"There is something which I have to tell you. I am not what you think I am. I am a serving officer of the German Army. I am on duty, but not in uniform. My name is not Nils Jorgensen but Otto Falken. I was not a passenger upon the train which was derailed: I was in charge of the . . . the working party which was responsible for the derailing."

There came a strangled little sound from Clare—and then silence. Father and daughter stared steadily up at him. His mouth was dry, and he had to moisten his lips with his tongue before the words would come easily again. He said:

"There is a very great reason why I am telling you this. It is that my mind has changed. I am no longer loyal to the Reich and my oath of service. I am of opposing opinion. My mind began to change at the very beginning of this new duty I was given—or even before that, I think; but I did not know it. I did not know it rightly until after I was hurt and was here."

He paused, and still Ingolls did not speak and watched him. And Clare's eyes were fixed upon him too. He could feel them. She said, very quietly and as if she did not know she were speaking:

"Oh, God! . . . Oh, my God!"

Then Ingolls spoke. His voice, amazingly, was his ordinary voice. He said:

"The Vulcania? You were aboard her, weren't you? Or was that some sort of a cooked-up story?"

"Yes," Otto said. "Yes, I was aboard her. I was Nils Jorgensen, a carpenter's mate; the only thing that was . . . was arranged was my being taken aboard. I do not know how—but they are very clever."

Clare spoke to him. If she had not been in his sight,

he could not have known her voice. She said:

"The story about the English woman and the boy and

your keeping them afloat all that time?"

"That was true." Otto looked straight in front of him. "I... we were together when we jumped from the ship. The boy found our way to get off. He was . . . a good boy. I tried to save him and his mother."

There was a long silence, and in it no one moved.

"The train," said Ingolls suddenly. "Did you plan

that and carry it out?"

Otto said: "It was planned and the charge placed and the . . . the beginning work done by my superior officer. But he could not be there on the final day—and I was commanding the work-party. I was . . . involved in the wreck because a man had left something near the track and it might have been dangerous to be found and I tried to recover it."

Clare spoke again. Her face was hidden from him by the hand which was over her brow. She said:

"That terrible thing in Texas? That dreadful oil fire? Did you . . ."

This time he did not let her finish. He said:

"That was . . . had nothing of my work in it. It was my superior officer—the same man. I have had . . ." He fumbled and lost his words and sentence and breathed deeply and started again. "I should explain that my work was more than being assistant to my super—to this man. It was double work. He is suspected of having ambitions for himself which are not liked by the ones above him, and my main duty was to report secretly upon him while being his aide—his lieutenant. . . . I do not explain it well but perhaps you will understand."

Ingolls said: "We're starting at the wrong end, Clare.' He looked at his daughter and she turned her face towards

him but did not speak. "We're behaving like children," he said. "He tells us two astounding facts—first, that he is in this country as a Nazi agent—or 'officer' as he calls it—and second he says that he has decided that he no longer believes in Naziism. And we are so flabbergasted by the whole thing, like a pair of kids, that we just grip on to the first one—which is far less important." He continued to look at Clare while he spoke but Otto could feel that the words were as much for him.

"We were carried away by the hope," Ingolls said, "that the snake we've been nourishing in our bosom hadn't been poisoning our friends. We had to try and prove that to ourselves. But let's stop that nonsense right now! Let's ask him questions which really matter." He looked at Otto now, still standing stiffly above him. He

said:

"Falken, did you say your name was? Falken: Why did you change? What, if you have changed, are you going to do about it? And in any and either case, what did you tell us for? Why—if you have changed and this isn't some trick—did you put yourself and us in this ungodly position? Why didn't you say nothing about it and get well and say thank you and leave and work out your unfortunate destiny in some private way?"

Otto met the hard, grey, unreadable eyes without

retreat. He said:

"I changed because I have found out that what I was taught is lies. I can explain more if you wish, but it will take me very long and if you do not believe me now you will not if I say more. But it is true."

He waited, and Ingolls said: "Go on!"

"I know what I am going to do—but I will answer that afterwards. And I told you because . . . because . . ."

He stopped. He had been ready. He had known the

words he was going to say—but they had gone.

Clare got suddenly to her feet. "I know why," she said to her father, and wheeled away from the group and the soft circle of light about the chairs and stood somewhere in the shadow.

Ingolls peered after her. "So!" His voice was without expression.

Otto plunged, not knowing whether or not he had been

grateful for the interruption. He said:

"There is another reason . . ." and could have cut out his tongue for the word 'another,' and checked only a little and went on: "There is one reason why I told you: it is weak and I am not proud to give it. It is that I would like your opinion, sir, upon what I . . . upon the decision I have made to do. And especially is that so after what you have told me last night." The English words were playing tricks with him now and he feared that he had not made sense with them but knew he could not do better. He swayed a little upon the splints and angrily called his body to attention.

Ingolls stood up. He pointed to his chair and said:

"Sit," in a manner which gave no room for protest.

Otto lowered himself into the chair. He felt weak and shaking and was angry with his body. He saw that Ingolls had stepped out of the light now and in the shadows was standing beside the dim straight figure of Clare. A murmuring came to his ears but no word.

And then Ingolls was back in the light, standing over

him.

"I don't know," Ingolls said, "whether I want to hear

what you're going to do."

He might have said more, but his daughter spoke before he could continue. She came back into the light and stood beside him, but with her back to Otto in the chair. She said:

"Of course you don't want to hear! Why should you? It'll only be more difficult for you to do what you have to do!" Her voice still did not sound to Otto's ears like her own.

Ingolls said: "And why shouldn't I hear what he's got

to say? We've listened so far; why no farther?"

Clare said: "Because we're Americans," and then cut her speech off abruptly. Otto could see her shoulders move to the labour of her breathing. Ingolls said: "You mean that it's our duty to report what he's told us—that he's what they call a fifth columnist?" His voice, as Otto noted with a dull surprise which pierced even through the bodily fatigue and mental stress which seemed at every moment to be upon the point of overpowering him, was still his usual voice.

Clare said: "You know very well what I mean!" and

turned away and went quickly out of the light again.

Ingolls sat down upon the arm of the chair next to Otto's and leaned forward and looked into Otto's face. He said:

"You realized all this before you said anything. You knew we were Americans—and you knew what our feelings were. You must have known that we should at least think it our duty to hand you over—I was going to say as a spy, but I'll have to change the word to 'saboteur.'"

"Yes," Otto said, "I had thought that would be what

you must feel."

Ingolls said: "What else did you think, then? Or is that what you want?" He said the last sentence incredulously, and Otto could feel the grey eyes upon him.

A small, stifled sound came from the shadows behind his chair and he wanted to turn and leap to his feet and take Clare into his arms. But he sat still and did not turn

his head. He said carefully:

"I think you know that is not what I want. And you know, too, that you would be doing nothing for your country or your cause if you did now make them arrest me."

Clare's voice said something from the darkness behind him and Ingolls looked toward the sound as he spoke. He said:

"That's true! If this one says he won't talk, he won't—not for all the cigarette-ends and rubber hose in America." He swung around upon Otto. "That's what you mean, isn't it?"

Otto said: "That is what I mean."

Ingolls spoke to his daughter again "This conversion: do you believe him?"

"Yes," said Clare's voice from the shadows. "Yes!" and Otto started as if someone had struck him.

Ingolls said: "So do I." He faced Otto again and seemed about to speak, but then was silent for a long moment.

"Clare!" he said at last. "Come here."

She came slowly into the light and stood beside him. He took her by the arm and pushed her gently into the chair beside Otto's and then himself sat upon the arm of it with a hand upon her shoulder. He said to Otto:

"Tell us what you plan to do?"

Otto sat forward a little. He gripped his hands, one over the other, between his knees. He said:

"Very well. I will not use the names of places or people, but I will tell you."

(vii)

He finished—and a heavy silence seemed to hang about him. No one spoke or moved until Ingolls got to his feet and went to the table at the rim of the circle of light and busied himself with decanter and glasses and came back with a tumbler which he thrust in Otto's hands.

"Drink that," he said.

Otto drank, gratefully—and the silence still persisted, until Ingolls broke it.

"Before you began to talk," he said, "I couldn't see any way out for you; but that makes sense, Falken."

Clare said: "It does not! It's wrong, wrong!"

Otto did not turn his head to look at her. He felt numb and empty of strength and thought.

But Ingolls looked at her and shook his head. "No!

It's not wrong! "he said. "It's right!"

Clare said: "It isn't! It's . . . it's a frightened compromise. It's neither one thing nor the other. It's wrong!"

"Why?" said Otto heavily. "Why is it wrong? I do

not understand you." His voice sounded lifeless and far away in his own ears. And it surprised him: he had not known that he was going to speak.

"Nor do I!" said her father, and his voice was sharper

than Otto had heard it towards his daughter.

She stood up, with an abrupt and sudden movement. She tunned and faced her father, looking up at him. Her hands were locked in front of her, their fingers twisting about each other. She said:

"I believe him when he says he's . . . he's converted. But can't he see—can't you see—that what he proposes to do isn't the best thing for his . . . his new cause? It's all muddled up with silly notions about his own pride and . . . and . . ."

"Loyalties," Ingolls said, and then was silent again.

Clare said: "There's only one thing he can do—must do! And that's to get in touch, immediately, with Washington and tell them everything—all the names and plans and whereabouts of the whole horrible organization. That's the only right way!"

Otto tried to look at her but could not. His legs ached almost unendurably, and he shifted his weight uneasily in

his chair.

Ingolls said: "You don't understand, Clare. You don't understand at all."

Clare blazed at him "Don't talk like that—as if I were some idiotic child! Don't you realize that what he's proposing to do is first of all suicide for him and secondly absolutely useless to . . to America? Can't you see that? If he's so torn between his new duty and his old loyalties perhaps he does want to kill himself—but not this way he suggests—it's a mixture of Galahad and Quixote and . . . and Hitler! And it's treachery to what he believes in now!"

Amazingly, incongruously, Ingolls suddenly laughed. "You're a good advocate, my child, but you should have a better case!"

The laughter died from his face and voice as quickly and astonishingly as it had come, and Otto, who had looked

at him in wonderment, saw him again and with fresh surprise as an old man.

But Clare had not finished. "Don't let him, Daddy. don't let him!" Her voice was rising now and there were tears in it. "He'll do what you say if you'll only make him! He wanted your advice! Tell him what's rightnot to mind about his personal little prides and feelings, but to tell everything, now, to people who can just . . . just stamp out this whole 'secret army' he keeps talking about and crush it out of existence and make America safe! "

She whirled in a flash of movement and for the first time faced Otto and looked at him and spoke to him. Her face was pale beneath the golden tan and drawn with the passion of belief and the desire to force his mind to the shape of hers. She spoke with a sort of quivering, hushed intensity which plucked cruelly at the strings of Otto's heart. She said:

"Do you know what and when and where the next . . . atrocity is going to be? The next huge sabotage, like the Texas oil fire? Do you? You hinted, but I want it straight. Do you know?"

Otto said: "Yes. I know." His tongue was stiff and the words came heavily. "But my plan—if I work right —my plan would be in time for that to be prevented. That is the reason that I must be well and ready in three weeks.

But she would not let him go on. Her eyes blazed at him and she said: "Stop! Oh, stop!" and wheeled upon her father.

She said: "Did you hear that? Did you? He knows that some horror's going to happen and that it would certainly be prevented if he told everything! And he also knows that if he carries out this fantastic 'plan' of his, it's a hundred to one he'll be . . . be killed and the horror will happen.

She stopped suddenly as her father put gentle hands

upon her shoulders. Her body was shaking.

"Clare!" said Ingolls. "Clare, listen to me. You're

talking common sense, but this is an uncommon problem. You sound logical—but the basis of your logic's not quite right. It's too narrow, and not nearly deep enough! "

He stopped, looking down into his daughter's face. He smiled at her and put a sudden arm around her and swept her to the chair beside Otto's and set her down in it. He

said:

"Here's a man who's been on the wrong side and wants to change over and join the decent men. Now, you're saying the very first thing he should do is to betray his former fellow officers. You say they're so evil and the decent men are so good, that even this course is not only justifiable but right." He lowered his head to look closely at her face. "That's what you said, isn't it?"

She nodded. She was crumpled up in the big chair.

She looked very small.

"But," said her father, "there are some things you've forgotten. I won't say you never knew them, because you've lived with me for a long time now. You've forgotten, first, that this man couldn't betray fellow officers. And you've forgotten that, if he could, he wouldn't be the sort of man we'd want on this side. There's a word which nowadays seems to offend a great many people: they think it's a purely fairy-tale quality connected only with Knights and Dragons and Women's Virtue, but it's a hell of a lot more than this; it summarizes the difference between the decent way and the other way. It's the word honour. . . ."

Clare twisted her body uneasily. "But . . ." she

began, and was cut short.

"Wait!" said Ingolls. "Now the Nazis, as a deliberate part of their policy, have thrown honour away: they make promise after promise in order to break their word at the most advantageous moment for themselves and their plans. The decent men, on the other hand, don't do that and never will—so that individual men fighting for decency must have individual honour. Don't you see that, Clare? Don't you see that what he's told us is the only thing he can do?"

Otto levered himself to his feet. Without his stick, he

went to Ingolls on slow and clumsy but unwavering feet. He said:

"Thank you, sir," and held out his hand.

Clare's voice came from behind them. It was very low. She said:

"I... it was those people I was thinking about ... those people who may be killed. ..."

Ingolls turned towards her, but he laid a hand on Otto's

shoulder as he did so, and he smiled as he spoke.

"Don't worry, Clare," he said. "I don't think he'll let that happen. I think his grand, crazy scheme is going to work. I think he's going to make it work, although it seems impossible."

He dropped his hand from Otto's shoulder and suddenly moved away. He paused behind his daughter's chair and bent down and lightly kissed the gleaming dark hair.

He said:

"I'll be in the library. Have some letters to write,"

and was gone.

Otto looked after him and was about to speak but did not. He looked at Clare, and saw that she was huddled in the big chair, her feet drawn up beneath her and her head averted from him. She was very still, and very small. He checked an instinctive movement towards her and stumped across to the other chair and picked up his stick and as softly as he could began to make his slow way through the shadows to the door.

He had almost reached it when there came a swift, murmuring rush of feet and she was beside him and a hand was

laid upon his arm. She said:

"Nils!" and her voice was hushed and uneven, and she caught him by the shoulders and suddenly all of her body was pressed against his body and she slid an arm behind his head and pulled it down toward hers and he felt her mouth against his and there was the salt of tears upon his lips and she was gone.

12 SAN FRANCISCO— HIGHWAY—PALITOS

Upon the twenty-second day after he had announced that he could make himself strong within three weeks, Otto was in San Francisco. He was driven there in the Ingolls' car by John, the Ingolls' jetblack man-of-all-work. He made John set him down at the small apartment house where he had retained his quarters. He gave John ten dollars and shook hands with him and then stood and watched the car until it turned the corner and had gone, taking with it the last link with Clare and Waldemar that he would know—ever or until he should have wrought the miracle needed to bring success to his solitary, incredible campaign.

He stood for a while after the car had vanished. His head was turned still as it had been while he watched, but now his eyes were seeing nothing within the range of his

vision. He was seeing and thinking of Clare.

He wrenched his mind back to fact and the present and the need for instant and welcome and important action. The drawn, gaunt lines of his face were smoothed away and he even smiled as he went quickly across the pavement and into the doorway of the house; a taut, hard little smile which had in it resolve and the happiness brought by the imminence of action; the delight of certainty of mind and a purely physical joy in once more having the free and strong and unhampered use of his body.

As he ran up the stairs he limped a little, for now his left leg was slightly shorter than his right: but both legs

were strong and sure and quick once more—not to the full of their strength perhaps, but strong enough.

(ii)

He was busy, very busy, for two hours. He saw his landlord and behaved as if he were back to stay. He went to his bank and drew out all his money, which was three hundred and seventy-two dollars, with the exception of fifty which he left as a lull to possible suspicion. He purchased twenty yards of white blind-cord at a hardware store and some broad adhesive tape from a druggist. He also pondered the advisability of buying a gun—but decided against it. There was a better way of procuring one, and he seemed to remember talk of new regulations which made a permit necessary before firearms could be sold. He went to the garage where he kept his car and ordered it checked and ready for service—and then visited another garage, on the far side of the city, and paid a handsome deposit upon a U-Drive-U'rself roadster which he rented in another name and ordered ready for this evening when he would pick it up. He found a huge dilapidated store near the waterfront and purchased, as accessory to 'a joke upon some friends,' an outfit of clean but well-worn clothing which had belonged to and would suit a longshoreman out of work. He ate a large meal of some luxury and sat over it until it was three o'clock.

And then he telephoned and found that Altinger was not at the office and discovered him at the third outside number he called and was responsive to Altinger's raucously cheerful welcomes and told Altinger that he was fit and ready for work. He also made use of a phrase that was in their private code for telephonic use and meant that he had something of vital importance to discuss and after that had no difficulty in making an appointment for them to meet, as was essential to his plans, in Altinger's office.

"After five would be best," Otto said.

[&]quot;Five-forty-five," said Altinger. . . .

(iii)

Otto was there fifteen minutes earlier than this. Every one in the building had gone, as he knew they would have, but he still had his keys.

He went into Altinger's private office. Without much hope of success, he tried the drawers of Altinger's desk. But they were locked and he sat himself down to wait and employed the time of-waiting by going over in his mind, for perhaps the three-hundredth time, every step of his plan.

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He was undisturbed for seven minutes, and then the janitor came in upon his final rounds, attracted by the open outer door of the suite. He was an ancient, perpetually tipsy Irishman, and he was volubly delighted to see Mr. Jorgensen back after his terrible experiences. He exhibited symptoms of far too long a stay, but Otto managed to get rid of him before the quarter hour.

"Good night, Michael," said Otto. "I will lock up when I leave. And I will see you to-morrow." He smiled and closed the outer door and stayed by it, listening to the old man's footsteps as he shambled away along the corridor.

He looked at the clock upon the wall above Miss Irving's desk. There still lacked three minutes before the appointed time, and unless Altinger were early, there would now be none to know—at least before the late visit of the night-watchman—that there had been anyone here but Nils Jorgensen. That was good, very good. It fitted well.

It was not until five minutes before the hour that Altinger arrived.

Otto met him in the outer office: he had heard the

quick, familiar footfalls.

"Well, well!" said Altinger. "Look who's here! How are you, young Jorgensen? How are you?" He seized Otto's hand in a powerful grip and the bright dark eyes flickered over Otto from poll to toe.

Otto produced an answering smile. He said:

"I am well now. Fine!"

"Yes, you look it!" Altinger led the way into the inner room and slammed the door and turned and once more let the quick eyes roam over Otto in appraisal. "Look hard,

too. How'd you manage to keep so fit?"

Otto said: "I invented exercises for myself." He was trying to see, without letting his gaze direct itself too plainly, whether Altinger were wearing the shoulder-holstered gun which was occasionally an adjunct to his immaculacy. "That is, before they would let me stand. The last weeks I have been able to do more."

"Hot as hell in here!" said Altinger. "Whyn't you take off your coat?" He ripped off his own, and there was no gun, nothing save a silk shirt of quiet splendour.

Otto said, truthfully: "I have not felt it very hot here." He watched Altinger's back as he strode across to the desk, pulling the key chain from his pocket as he went. There was no gun in the hip pockets—which left only the one in the right-hand drawer of the desk.

And now Altinger, who had thrown himself into his padded swivel-chair, unlocked this drawer and opened it and pulled out a flat box of cigars and left the drawer open.

"Have a cigar?" he said, and took one himself and bit

off the end with large white teeth.

Otto walked over to the desk but did not sit. He shook his head, and Altinger found himself a light and presently sat back with a blue haze about his head.

"Well," said Altinger, "now business! What's on that I don't know about? Why did you give me the sign on the phone?"

Otto let his eyes flick a glance at the open drawer. He could see the butt of the Luger. He said:

"It is very important. I have seen Mrs. Van Teller. . . ."

Altinger took the cigar from his mouth. He said quickly:

"When? Saw her myself yesterday, on her way to Santa Barbara. She didn't say anything about you." He

sounded angry, and Otto, sweating a little at the thought of so narrow an escape from immediate revelation of his lie, thanked his providence for the man's overweening egoism. He played upon it some more. He said:

"That is strange. She said nothing of having been with you. It was this morning. Before I left. She telephoned to me and arranged that I should meet her on the road. At the roadhouse restaurant near Palitos." He had to talk Altinger away from the desk and the Lüger. He said:

"I met her. She was very . . . strange. She said to me too that she was en route to Santa Barbara. But she did not speak about you." He saw the effect of this stroke again: Altinger twisted in his chair and smoked furiously. "She told me there were two important matters to which I must attend at once—as soon as I was arrived back here, in San Francisco." He wondered what the first matter could be—and made a quick decision. "The first matter was that I must find out how were the airangements for Plan Six . . ."

He got no further. Altinger jumped to his feet, his

eyes blazing. He said, almost shouted:

"I reported to her on Plan Six; spent half a day on the job. I told her everything—even though I didn't want to! What the hell sort of monkeyshine is this!" He cursed, both in English and in German.

Otto was startled by the German—not by the words, which were those of any barrack-room, but by the accent, which placed Rudolph Altinger as originally in a stratum from which it would never have occurred to Otto that he had climbed.

"And why in hell," said Altinger, recovering control, "they ever let women muddle with men's work, I don't know!" He tried to laugh away his outburst of a moment before, but found it difficult. He came out from behind the desk to the clear centre of the room and began to pace up and down, his powerful shoulders hunched forward, his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets.

He had been talked away from the desk and the Lüger,

and Otto, behind a mask-like face, was jubilant. He moved away from the desk himself, standing between it and Altinger. Now the campaign could begin. He said:

"That was strange—to ask me about Plan Six! But it

was not so strange as the second matter."

Altinger, who had ceased his pacing near the window and was staring out of it, wheeled about as if a knife had pricked him.

"What was it?" he said. The words came through unopened teeth, and his whole blunt face was twisted in a peculiar, snarling grimace which might have been mistaken for a smile if the eyes had been hidden.

Otto said: "She asked me to find out . . . to calculate for her how long a time would have to be taken, in an acute emergency, to evacuate all the officers of all the units under the Staff Council!"

"What?" said Altinger in a whisper. He came closer to Otto and stared into his face.

Otto said: "To . . . to get them all safely out of this country." He took pains to sound as well as seem bewildered. "I could not believe what I was hearing. So I asked her questions—and she repeated. It did not matter, she said, where they arrived, so long as it was in some place not under American or British jur . . . jur-is-diction. The very fastest method: I was to find out, and report to her within three days at Santa Barbara. She told me a telephone number." He made a convincing little gesture towards his pocket, as if to bring forth a book or paper on which this number was written.

But Altinger was not looking at him. Altinger was lost

in deep and utterly concentrated thought.

Otto reached past him and quietly pulled down the windowshade and shut off any possible view into the room. The bowl-light in the centre of the ceiling jumped into sharpened life and the walls pulled closer together.

Altinger whispered: "What in hell is this?" He was

speaking to himself and not to Otto.

Otto said: "I did not know what to do. I considered—and I saw that the only thing was to tell you."

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"Quite right. Absolutely right!" Altinger was aware

of him again.

Otto said: "Perhaps she meant that I should ask you. And I am not exceeding her orders by asking you. Because I think you are the person who would know, or would be able to . . . to calculate."

Altinger smiled at him. "Quite correct, young Jorgen-

sen; hundred per cent! "

Otto said: "It is very curious!" He was not happy: the man must tell him; must be made to tell him. "Do you think perhaps that there is some trouble that we do not know? And that we must be ready to . . . to evacuate? I have thought that it would take long—too long if there were real trouble—three weeks or perhaps more."

Altinger laughed. "You're crazy, son. I got out a scheme twelve months ago—on higher orders than Madame Van Teller's, too! Ten days is the maximum!" The self-laudatory smile went from his face and he frowned. "But what does . . ."

He got no further. An astounding, impossible, bewildering thing happened to him then. Young Jorgensen laughed—and shot out a hand and gripped him by the front of his shirt. The grip hurt—and the laugh had been a strange, harsh sound.

Otto tightened the grip. His heart was pounding in his ears and there was a racing surge of excitement through him. It had worked. The first, essential step of his plan had been made. He ordered himself to be cold and calm. He said:

"Ten days! That is what I wished to know!"

Rudolph Altinger, the first stunning shock of his amazement past, was staring up into the unknown face of this known man with eyes again bright and shrewd and calculating. He said:

"What's the matter with you!" in too smooth a tone, and Otto saw the muscles tighten across the heavy

shoulders.

Otto said sharply: "Do not move!" But he was too

late—for Altinger, with a sudden explosion of force almost unbelievable in a man of his age, broke loose from the grip and left a shred of silk in Otto's right hand and swung a tremendously powerful underarm blow for the pit of Otto's stomach.

He was quick, but not quick enough—for Otto's right arm struck away the advancing blow while his own left fist, moving in a flashing six-inch arc, cracked against the point of the heavy out-thrust chin.

A strange little snarling sound broke from Altinger's mouth, and he twisted a little and fell forwards, pitching on to his face upon the thick pile of the carpet. . . .

(iv)

The senses of Rudolph Altinger came back to him with a painful and immediate rush. It could not have been many seconds since they had been driven out—but he could not move. He lay on the carpet still, but upon his side. And he could not use his arms nor legs, for something bound them together. And he could not open his mouth: there was something over it which was stuck to his lips and the skin of his cheeks and hurt both when he tried to speak or draw in a deeper breath. There was a deep ringing in his ears and fiery specks danced before his eyes. He closed the eyes—and felt arms about him which raised him as if his hundred and seventy pounds were the weight of a child and then thrust him roughly into a hard chair whose arms scraped against his elbows as he fell into it.

He opened his eyes again. The ringing in his ears was less and the specks in front of his eyes were fewer and he was aware of the figure of young Jorgensen bending and looming over him and winding something about his middle which forced him cruelly yet further back into the chair.

(v)

Otto stood over his prisoner and looked down at him. "Now!" said Otto. "I will explain. You can hear me—and understand what I am saying? Nod your head."

Rudolph Altinger nodded his head.

Otto said: "If you do not understand me, shake your head. I will tell you now why this has happened. I am no longer a loyal soldier of the Reich. Nor do I consider myself a subject of the present Germany. I am opposed completely to the aims and principles of the present leaders of Germany."

He paused. He had been speaking very slowly. He knew the words he had said, and those which he was going to say, by heart. He had rehearsed them, many times. But he was slow because he must be sure, absolutely sure, that he was understood without possibility of error. An error would make no difference whatsoever to his enemies, but every difference to himself and his motives and his . . . honour. He thought, suddenly and unexpectedly, of Clare—and then of her father. It was a long moment before he spoke again.

He said then: "I am not going to tell you why I have . . . changed. You would not understand. I am telling you only that I have changed. When I found that I had changed, I did not know what to do. Again you would not understand, so I am telling you only what I have decided. I have decided that I cannot betray you and the others in this country who serve the Reich. I have decided that I must warn you, and then allow you ten days—that is the time you have told me—to get them and yourself out of this country. After the ten days I shall tell in the Capitol all that I know—everything. And that is a great deal: it is all the names of the officers—and where they are—and all the Plans, including Plan Six—and the names of the Staff Council and where they are to be found—and much more! Enough to be sure that when they know, the authorities of

this country will at once be able to seize all of you. . . . Do you fully understand what it is that I am saying?"

Rudolph Altinger nodded his head. His eyes were sharp and bright again. They seemed darker than ever Otto had seen them.

Otto said: "I could have spoken to you more quickly in German. But I do not wish to do this—again for reasons which you will not understand. But you will understand this: I am not going to speak anything of what I know, to anybody, until the eleventh day from to-night. I have not told anyone anything which would make them know the names or plans. I have left nothing written which would tell anything. What I know is in my head and only there. So that it is now a . . . battle between us, between myself alone and the whole of the Staff Council and their units. That is not a battle which is equally matched—but the balance is over upon your side so that I can never say to myself that I changed and was a traitor to the men I had been with before I changed. You do not understand that feeling, but you do understand what I am saying? Nod your head, or shake your head."

Rudolph Altinger nodded his head.

Otto said: "I am taking this advantage only—that I have planned before what I shall do, and have put you there, like that, so that you are unable to do anything until someone frees you, and you will therefore not be able to set your men and yourself after me so soon that I should have no chance against the numbers. But that is only a little advantage for me—it leaves the balance down upon your side still."

He stopped speaking. He looked at Rudolph Altinger for a long time. He said at last, in a different tone, and much more quickly than he had been speaking:

"I could have killed you. I have the thought that perhaps I should have killed you. But that would be

against the plan I have made for myself."

Altinger's eyes were staring into his. They said to him: "You're a damned fool not to kill me. I shall kill you!" Otto said: "I am going now. It is my ob—objective to

be in Washington upon the eleventh day from to-night and

telling all that I know."

He did not look at the man again. The Lüger from the desk-drawer was in his pocket, and in it was a full clip of cartridges. He turned away and went swiftly to the door and turned out the light and in a moment was out of the suite and had locked all the doors behind him and was going softly down the stairs.

(vi)

He left the building by the back door and went through the paved yard and into the alleyway and came out on to June Street at the end of the block. Before he crossed into Gate Avenue, he turned and looked up at the window of Altinger's inner office. The blind was down and there was no light behind it; he knew there would not be, but it was no harm to make certain.

He went down Gate Avenue with a quick, sure stride in which the limp was barely perceptible. He felt light and hard and almost gay. He found his car where he had parked it and drove off, not too fast, towards his apartment house. He heard himself whistling-and realized with a little shock that the air was something from the Offenbach Parisienne ballet.

He stopped three blocks away from the house and parked inconspicuously upon a dirty, narrow by-street. He walked the rest of the way and reached his apartment without so much as being seen by anyone else in the house. He locked the outer door and stripped and took a shower. But he did not shave, although the beard was beginning to be stubbly upon his face, and when he dressed himself it was in the faded sweater and dungarees which he had bought in the waterfront store.

He put his money in his belt and some socks and two worn shirts and a toothbrush in the duffel bag which went with the clothes. He took a light, long polo-coat from its hanger and tied it up in an ugly bundle which he strapped to the duffel bag. He was ready—a full seventy-five minutes ahead of his careful schedule. He was smiling as he went softly out of the apartment door and reached the rear stairs, still with no one seeing him, and made his way down them and thence to the street behind the house.

He was very careful as he went to his car by devious ways. He was not followed and knew he could not be so soon, but he wanted to leave no impression upon any eyes which saw him.

The by-street was empty when he got into the car and drove away. He took off the greasy peaked cap and set it on the seat beside him and was secure in the thought that the street-lights were not strong enough to show any incongruity between his clothes and the car.

He had a long time before his next move, and there was no point in picking up the *U-Drive* car any earlier than was necessary. He determined to eat, and found, with some surprise, that the thought of food had made him voraciously

hungry.

He went to Panama Pat's, which is dirty and crowded and filled with the riffraff of the port, but which is completely unknown to sightseers and serves meals both admirably cooked and enormous.

He parked the car two hundred yards away and presently drifted into Pat's and was safely lost among the throng. He had a drink at the bar and then sat down in one of the narrow single-seater booths and ordered a steak.

He was half-way through it when he heard the voices from the bigger booth at his back. Whether the men had been there all the time or had just sat down he did not know. He heard the rustling of a newspaper, and then the first voice.

"See they pinched his wife now," it said, and mentioned a famous Nazi name.

"So what?" The second voice was scornful. "That won't help 'em any."

"Maybe not. But they done it jest the same. They pull

that all the time! "

"Yeah. Regular standard Nazzy trick. They figure th' bes' wayta make surea gettin' a guy'sta grab his dame or his kid 'n then he'll cometa them without no more trouble!"

Otto heard no more. His heart seemed to stop beating and then to start again with a shaky, irregular thumping.

He had not even considered the possibility!

He fought against blind panic and began to think. Was there any chance—any chance at all—that they would somehow guess at what Clare meant to him? Was there any way in which the thought of her might occur to them? Because, even if it were just the thought, with nothing to base it on save her very existence, they might try! They would have to use any and every potentiality! They might try!

But would they even get the thought? Altinger had

seen her, of course. . . .

And so had Carolyn Van Teller! So had Carolyn Van Teller!

He closed his eyes—and he could see the smile with which Carolyn Van Teller had looked at Clare as they both stood by his bed. . . .

He pushed his plate away and rapped upon the table for the dirty-coated Chinese waiter. His mouth was dry and his heart was thudding somewhere up in his throat and he felt as if he were going to vomit.

The waiter came and Otto gave him two dollar bills and waved away change and got out of the place and back

to his car as quickly as he could without running.

He sat in the car without turning on the lights. The quiet and the darkness helped him to think. And, as he thought, the worst of his fear subsided, to be replaced by a great thankfulness that he had happened to overhear the idle words which had shown him the danger in time.

Because it was in time. Altinger could not yet be free; the Machine was not yet in motion—and what he must do was to warn Waldemar and make certain that Clare's safety was sure and then return to the prepared steps of his plan.

How should he warn Waldemar? Over the telephone? He could, because Waldemar would understand the

guarded sort of talk he would have to use. Or should he—better, far better!—make swift alteration in the campaign and carry out the business with the two cars as planned but then drive north-west instead of south and go by Los Robles and deliver the warning in person and... and see Clare again as he did so?

Yes: that was it. It was safe and right—and he would

see Clare.

He started the car and switched on his lights and drove away, uptown, towards the *U-Drive* garage.

(vii)

His nearest way would take him right across the busy intersection of which the office building was the north-east cornerstone. He used this way now, though earlier he had not intended to do so. The light was green, and he shot across the main road and then slackened as he entered the familiar block of June Street and leaned across the seat and peered up, just to check, at Altinger's window.

It was shaded still—but there was bright light behind

the shade!

The car lurched—and he pulled it straight as he sat up with panic wrapping cold fingers around his entrails. Out of the corner of his eye, he tried to see the doorway to the office building, but the car was too far past by now and he dared not check nor stop. He drove on, slowly increasing speed. His mind raced, trying against deadly fear to be cold and direct and certain.

Altinger could neither have worked himself loose nor attracted attention: someone, by some frightful mischance, had gone to the office, and now Altinger was free!

How long had he been free?

The clock on the dashboard said eight-thirty. He had left Altinger and the office building at twenty-five minutes past six and looked back from the corner and seen the blank, unlighted window. So that, conceivably, Altinger

could have been free for over two hours! And an hour for Altinger, working at pressure, was half a day for other men!

He must find a telephone. At once he must find a telephone—as soon as he had made sure and doubly sure that he was not followed. He began, driving as fast as he dared, to weave a maze about the hilly streets. He turned left three times and right a couple; then four times right and one left and then straight ahead and around a block and back upon his own tracks. And then he found a narrow street which rose more steeply than the others and turned into it and drove uphill and then stopped and pulled in to the curb and watched in his rear mirror for pursuers.

But there were none. There were no cars at all—and very soon he slipped in his gear and climbed the hill and turned west and reached a more populous district and put the car into a park beside a petrol station and ran to a chemist's upon the other side of the street and shut himself into the telephone booth and put through a long-distance call to Los Robles.

He waited for age-long minutes.

"Hehlo!" said the operator. "Hehlo: on your call to Palitos three-one, sir, there seems to be trrouble on that line! We cannot make a connection. . . ."

Otto put the receiver back upon its hook. His stomach felt like water and it seemed difficult to breathe. He slammed open the door of the booth and ran out of it and across the road for his car.

13 PALITOS—HIGHWAY —MONTEREY

He reached the highway crossroads outside the little rural town of Palitos in something over two hours. He drove with a coldly maniac precision of speed—and his self, it seemed to him, was always ahead of the flying wheels.

But he still thought. He did not drive into the village, but turned off before he reached it, along the narrow but well-paved branch road to Hudson. He was not followed:

he made sure of that.

He was heading for the entry to Los Robles' acres which Clare had shown him only a week ago. It was a hidden one—and only she and Waldemar used it. There was no gate, but a section of seemingly immovable fencing which one could lift and swing aside when one knew the trick. There was no track which was visible from the road, but as soon as one had bumped over the slight rise in the rolling pasture-land there was—and it stretched, narrow and winding but in good weather easily navigable, up and down over the waves of the foothills and thus into the oaks and through them to the house.

He swung the fence outward and drove through it and stopped the car again and replaced the fence. He jumped into the car again and started off in second—and heard, somewhere near him but out of his sight, a whinny of surprise and fear from a horse's throat and the thudding of galloping hoofs.

He reached the top of the rise—and stopped the car.

He did not know whether it was at that moment or a few seconds earlier that he first noticed the glow in the sky; the pink, upward-spreading glow which was deepening to red against the silver-tinted blackness of the natural night.

He stared through the spotted windshield at the glow, and he seemed to cease living with everything except his mind. If they had fired Los Robles, it meant only one thing: they already had Clare. . . .

He sat without moving. His hands gripped the wheel and were numb with the force of the grip. His mind was alive to agony—but it would not make thoughts.

He did not know whether to go on or turn back. And

his mind would not think. It only felt.

He switched off the engine. Something in his head was saying: 'Make certain! Make certain!' He got out of the car after he had switched off the lights and walked a few strides away from it. The long thick grass whispered around his legs.

And then it happened. He was staring towards the black belt of trees and the glow above them when there was a movement near him in the long grass and he jumped back and whipped a hand to his hip-pocket for the Luger.

A figure rose from the grass and came steadily, too steadily, towards him—a slight, small, trousered figure which was not a boy but Clare.

He could not believe his eyes. He stared through the faint moonlight, his hand still tight around the pistol-butt. He knew—but he dared not know.

She came right up to him. There was an unnatural precision about her walk. Her face showed ash-grey in the silver light. He did not move. She came close to him, very close. She did not speak. She did not make any sound.

He touched her. He put an arm about her shoulders and tried to read her face and saw it only as a mask. He said:

"You are hurt?" and then could not get any more words to come from his mouth.

"No," she said, and that was all.

"Your father?" He had to force his lips to move.

She said: "He's dead. They killed him." Her voice was flat, without any tone-gradation. It was not like her voice. She said:

"There were a lot of men. They came to the house. We were having dinner. I'd cooked it because the servants are out to-night. They wanted to take me away. Father killed one of them. Then they shot him—through the head." Her voice was still flat and level, without trace of emotion. "I got away—while the commotion was on when they shot father. I dropped out of a closet window and they didn't see me. I slipped into the stable and took Pedro out. I got on him bareback and went off fast before they could stop me. I went the other way first and then doubled around when I was sure they couldn't hear me. Your car frightened Pedro and he dumped me and ran off."

The glow in the sky was high and spreading and growing every moment more shot with orange. Otto did not say anything. He took her by the arm and led her to the car and put her into it. She went stiffly, like an automaton. He climbed in beside her and turned the car and then stopped it and got out to open the fence and very soon was on the Hudson road again and driving, as fast or faster than the twisting narrow road allowed, away from the glare behind them.

(ii)

They drove the eight miles to the far highway in ninc minutes—and nothing followed them. In the back of his mind, Otto was concerned about this: he did not know whether it was matter for relief or added reason for apprehension.

Clare sat stiffly beside him, silent and immobile. She spoke only once, when they were on the last three-mile straight-away which runs downhill to the main road. She

said:

"It was such a lovely house." But her voice was still

the same, stiff, stranger's voice.

Otto did not speak at all. His mind was workingvery fast. A new plan must be made—and, moreover, its making would keep his mind from sick dwelling upon the

thought of the harm he had brought to her.

He slowed for the highway turning and swung out on to it. His breathing stopped as he saw a car pulled up at the corner with three men standing by it. But as he passed, cutting over to the other side of the wide main road, he saw that there was another man, in light-coloured overalls, who was changing a wheel.

There was very little southward traffic. He took the outer lane and kept his right foot down and hurtled at over

eighty miles an hour back towards San Francisco.

For he had decided that the main base of the new plan should be the same as that of the old—he would go in a direction, taking San Francisco as the starting point, directly opposite to that of Washington. And, as in the careful scheme which he had been forced to abandon, he would stay in hiding until nearly the end of the ten-day time-limit and then make one dash for the goal.

But he must not take the car too near to San Francisco. They knew this car and would be watching for it everywhere. He wondered how he had managed to escape pursuit for this length of time, and then reflected that it was a very short length of time: probably they were still near

the burning house, searching for Clare.

She spoke again suddenly, still in the dead voice.

"Where are we going?" she said.

He eased the pressure upon the accelerator. He looked carefully into the rear-mirror and saw only one car behind him and let this pass and waited until the speedometerneedle pointed to sixty-five and then spoke. He did not know how he was going to say what he had realized he must say-but he plunged. He said:

"I must go to somewhere—anywhere—to the other side of San Francisco. I cannot drive in the car much longer. They will be watching for it—but I can stop in the next

town and see that you go safely to the police, if that is what

you want to do."

She said: "No. I will stay with you if you can take me." She did not move her head as she spoke to him: she was straight and stiff and motionless, and the voice was still untinged by any shade of feeling. "If I go to the police, I would have to say too much, and that would spoil what you're doing."

He let the car slow still further and turned his head

towards her.

"That . . . that is . . ." He found himself stammering. "You are sure?" he said shortly. He did not know how to speak to her. He did not know her.

She said: "Since you went, father and I have been

talking. I understand everything."

Her voice did not even pause at the word 'Father.' "What you're trying to do is too important to be spoilt by little, ordinary things."

She was silent again, sitting in the same rigid posture, looking straight before her, but not, he knew, seeing the

road.

A surge of feeling made speech impossible for him but he did not know what he felt.

(iii)

They left the car some thirty miles out of San Francisco. Otto turned off the highway on to a dirt road and bumped along it for half a mile and then turned into a field of tares and stopped and they got out. Clare obeyed at once everything he told her. She did not speak.

He left the car facing north. He took out the duffel bag and the rolled coat and three packets of cigarettes from the glove-compartment. He separated the coat from the bag and gave it to Clare: she must carry it, folded, over her arm. He looked at her, and the set, blank pallor of

her face frightened him, but he did not want to show the fear. He said:

"We must now go on a bus. We will walk back to the highway for a little while together, but when we get there we are not together. You will go first. Turn to the right on the highway and walk along to the petrol-station which is about a quarter of a mile. It is at the edge of a small town, and the Oakland buses halt there. When the first bus comes get into it and take a seat as far in front as you can find. I will get on the bus too. But I am not with you. You understand?" He had to keep looking at the white face—but it frightened him.

She nodded her head, but she did not speak. He knew that she understood, and he knew that she would do as he told her. He said:

"There are more things you must do," and gave further orders, slowly and clearly and stiffly. . . .

(iv)

It was after four when their second bus reached its final destination in Monterey. There were, unusually for this hour, several other passengers. They seemed to be one party, though, and Otto, who had studied them for long hours from behind a newspaper bought in Oakland, had decided that they were what they seemed and nothing more. He should have been delighted and eased in his mind by this certainty—but he was not: there was something unexpectedly and irrationally terrifying in the utter absence of pursuit.

The party dragged itself off the bus, yawning and chattering. Otto himself got off. He did not look behind him, but walked out of the yard to a corner of the white, steep street and paused there and took a long time to find and light a cigarette. At the bottom of the hill the sea gleamed greenish in the greying light. The air was sharp and smelt sharply of salt water. He shivered a little. He

heard behind him the footsteps he had been waiting for and turned around for one reassuring glance and saw her. She was twenty yards away. She did not look at him. She was still moving stiffly, like an automatic doll. He could not see her face. She had put the coat over her shoulders in the bus, but now she had folded it again and was carrying it over her arm.

He walked on, up the hill. He did not know where he was going. He was looking for some point where he could speak to Clare; some point where he could see all about him and know, beyond all possibility of error,

whether or not they were observed.

He walked up the steep street. On either side it was lined by small white houses. Their outlines were growing sharper all the time as the pre-dawn greyness encroached

upon night.

He found a place, just past the first street intersection which crossed his path up the hill. It was a narrow alleyway between two of the white buildings. He turned into it and stopped. In the whole length of the steep street, he had seen before he left it, were no human figures save himself and Clare.

She joined him. It was much lighter now, and he could see her clearly as she came steadily along, between the high white walls, towards him.

She spoke before he could. She said, in the flat, emotionless voice:

"Why have we come here—to Monterey?"
He was still staring at her. She frightened him.

"It was the furthest place which the bus went," he said. "And it is not a large place, I think. And perhaps we can go quickly away from it and into some wild country and find a place to hide. If we do this for one week. .

She stopped him. She said, as if he were not speaking:

"I know Monterey. Very well. And the country. I think somewhere we could hide very well. If it hasn't changed."

He said: "Where is it?" and asked her nothing more.

"It's about three miles," she said. She was looking straight into his eyes, and he saw that over her eyes was a sort of polished shield of blankness.

"You follow," she said—and turned away from him

and walked out from between the white walls.

(v)

For an hour which seemed like six he followed the steady, stiff little figure as it walked, with unvarying pace and gait, up the hills and out of the white small town. He did not think it strange to be following her thus blindly. Sometimes he was only thirty yards behind it, at others he deemed it wise to be as much as a hundred. But she never turned her head. She walked on. If he had not known this was Clare; if the back which he followed had been pointed out to him as Clare's back and he had not seen her face, he would have denied that this was Clare. The free, lovely, synchronized swing of the lithe body was gone—as the life and feeling had gone from the soft deep voice. He felt fear again—fear and other, tenderer emotions which clutched him by the throat and frightened him the more.

She led him up and up and away from the white buildings and along barren hillside roads. The greyness paled and became the bright hard light of dawn. They left the yellowing hillsides and were on the plateau behind the peninsula and there was greenness everywhere about them, as far as a man could see. Green grass and green growing things and the darker, more ominous green of the trees—cypress and spruce, fir and pine. . . .

They came on to a main road, and Otto crossed to the other side of it and increased his distance from the implacable, steadily moving back and covertly scanned each of the few vehicles which passed them and was again satisfied—with an increase of the weird fear that such satis-

faction gave him—that no one of them was other than it seemed.

She struck off the main road and climbed a gate and was lost in a forest of tall, dark pines. He hastened, since there was nothing which could see him upon the road, and vaulted the gate himself and plunged into the chill shadow of the trees and saw her, still walking ahead of him with no alteration in pace or stride or carriage, along an aisle between the harsh, straight boles.

He followed—and near the edge of the trees, when he could see beyond them bright sunshine golden upon feather-tipped wild grass, she halted.

She turned to face him, waiting.

He drew level with her and she turned and pointed ahead, off to their right, through the thinning trees.

"Look!" she said. "That's the place I meant."

He followed the pointing finger with his eyes and saw a house. It seemed to be in a bay made by the curving outline of the limits of the fir-wood.

It was black and gaunt and sprawling in the hard early light. It had an air of indescribable desolation. Around it wild grass and high weeds flourished in a mess of gold and green and brown which despite the colour was ugly to the eye. It was a clumsy shape—a disproportioned L with a bulging small crosspiece athwart the shorter arm. Its windows were filled with cracked and jaggedly rotting boards. Beyond it, the trees bulged out again. It was a hideous island in a sea of sombre, overshadowing green.

She said: "It's been here, like that, since I was a child of fourteen. Some old Spanish people had it. Somewhere, there's someone who owns it—and the land around. But he won't sell it—or have it touched. People say he's mad. The Spanish people in Monterey have a name for the whole place—they call it *Desalinos*—and they won't come near it. Nobody ever comes near it."

(vi)

They got in through a window at the back, in the shade of the first rank of lowering pines. Otto gently pried a rotting shutter from its hinges and climbed through a glassless window and leaned out and lifted Clare in his arms and swung her over the sill to stand beside him. Her body was rigid, with every muscle tense.

He pulled the shutter back into position and wedged it. The porch in which they stood grew dark again, with criss-cross bars of sunlight stabbing through the holes and crevices of the gaping woodwork of the shutter and even the walls. There was a sweet, sick, musty smell of decay

which pressed around them.

· She did not say anything. She was not leading now. She had brought him here, and she was waiting. She stood motionless beside him.

He was going to speak to her, but he changed his mind. He started for the door to the inner body of the house: it had a great splash of yellow sunlight right across its lock. He tried the handle and it came away in his fingers. But the haft stuck out from the wood and he twisted it and the door opened and a bloated spider struck against his cheek and clung there a moment and then scuttled across his neck before he brushed it to the ground and set a heavy foot upon it.

Clare was at his shoulder. They went through the door and into what had been a kitchen and through that again into the rest of the house. It was darker here, with fewer

fingers of sunlight creeping in.

Under the dust and rot of years, the place was furnished; completely furnished. Otto stood in the centre hallway and peered about him. Clare was beside him, straight and stiff and silent. He could not speak to her. He was afraid of her.

And then, without warning, she swayed. Her whole body swayed as she stood. Her weight fell against him,

and he put quick arms about her. But she straightened her body and thrust the arms violently away. She said:

"I'm all right! I'm all right!" But then she swayed again and this time he picked her up like a child and set her down in a high-backed oaken chair. He said:

"Wait. Wait there. Do not move until I come back!

You understand?"

She did not speak, but she closed her eyes and let her arms fall along the arms of the chair and rested her head against its carven back.

He left her. He knew she would not move—and he must find somewhere for her to rest. He went into one of the rooms which must be a bedroom. Cobwebs burst stickily across his face and he brushed them off and strode to the bed in the far corner. Beneath the dust it was completely made, with covers and pillows and what must have been a quilt. He touched it—and a great flaky mass broke away under his hand and a sudden waft of musty throatcatching odour set him coughing.

He went out of the room quickly, a new thought spurring him. He had remembered the cellar door which they had passed—a half-door in the wall, coming no

higher than his waist.

He ran to it and pulled it open. It was of oak and unrotted and lay like a flap upon the floor. Through the dark square which gaped at him he could see nothing, but he felt steps and groped his way down them.

The cellar smelt dank and earthy, but nothing worse. It smelt like any cellar anywhere. He lit a match and held it high and saw brick-lined walls and a bare earthen

floor and nothing else.

He ran back up the steps again and quickly closed the door-flap to keep out the sick miasma of the house. He remembered the doors of a closet he had noticed in the hallway. He went to them and pulled them open—and was faced by shelves of mouldering wool and linen.

But on the lowest shelf were packed tier upon tier of canvas in its virgin original flat packing. He pulled out three of the bundles—and although their outer folds were mildewed and flaking, the better part of each was strong and sound.

He tumbled them out upon the floor and ripped off the bad parts and took it all in one great armful and carried it, feeling his way carefully, down the cellar steps. He dropped it then and began to fold it piece by piece and threefold. The pieces thus treated were over six feet long and some three feet wide and he set them down, one atop the other, in the farthest corner from the steps. The result was thick and reasonably soft, and he spared the last piece to roll into a sort of bolster which he laid at the head.

He went back to Clare. She was sitting just as he had

left her, but her eyes were widely open.

He did not speak to her yet. He picked her out of the chair in one quick movement and carried her along to the cellar doorway and set her on her feet. He said then:

"Go down the steps. I will hold you. Be careful—it

is dark!"

She went without a word—and he steered her over to the bed of canvas and made her lie down upon it. He knelt beside her and said:

"You must rest now. I am going to find food for us. Do you know where there is any store nearer than the town

-any store which would be open now?"

His eyes were growing used to the darkness and he saw her move and sit up beside him, her hands clasped about her knees. But he could not see whether or not she looked at him as she spoke. She said, in the same dead voice:

"There's a sort of cross-roads settlement about a mile and a half from here. Not on the road we came by, but the one out in front. Go straight through the trees and

you'll find it. Turn right—and keep on."

He unbuckled the watch from his wrist. Its figures

and hands glowed faintly in the darkness. He said:

"Take the watch. Go to sleep if you are able. But do not move away from down here at all. Unless it is three hours and I am not back. If that happens you go to the police. But that will not happen. I will be back before."

She said: "I understand," and quite suddenly relaxed.

Quietly, gently, she lay down. She put her head upon the pillow he had made and stretched her body straight and a small sound, hall groan, half gasp, came from her lips.

Still on his knees he peered at her face. He thought that her eyes were closed but could not be sure. Her breathing was deep and regular. He felt about with his hands for his coat, which had still been over her arm when she came down the cellar steps. He found it and shook it out and spread it over her. She did not move.

"Clare!" he said softly. "Clare!" But she did not

answer him. She was asleep.

(vii)

He found the road. He walked along it, keeping to the cover of trees and hedgerows as much as he could, until he came to the cross-roads she had described. There were three petrol stations and a chemist's and a car park. There were also three small shops—one selling hardware—and an Open-All-Around-The-Clock hamburger and coffee bar.

It was later than he had thought and the tradesmen earlier. All save one of the places were open for business. A long-distance bus had stopped here when he arrived, and three truck-loads of the new citizen soldiery. The hamlet was astir, and Otto quietly drifted in and was inconspicuous. He had the duffel bag with him, empty, and he bought as much as he dared without attracting attention. He did not buy nor even look at a newspaper. He distributed his purchases among the little shops and put everything into the bag and presently drifted away, just as everyone was gathering to watch the soldiers go.

He had seen no one whom he could even consider as a possible enemy. And he knew that, in the general com-

motion, nobody had taken particular note of him.

He should have been elated. But he was not. He was filled and possessed by uneasiness.

He made slow way back to the fir-wood and the house.

He knew that he was not watched by any human eyes. He climbed in through the same window and wedged the shutter again and went very softly down into the cellar.

She lay exactly as he had left her. She was so still that he lit a match and peered at her by its light. She was lying on her side. She breathed easily and deeply and the lines of the mask had been smoothed from her face. She looked like a child.

He let the match flicker out and turned away. Noise-lessly, in the corner farthest from where she lay, he unpacked his purchases. There were several tins and two loaves of bread and a small paraffin-stove and a bottle of fuel for it and a dozen candles. There were also two cheap towels and a toothbrush and a cake of soap and a special gift for Clare which was a small mirror in a fibre case.

He lit one of the candles and piled the things neatly and quietly. Apprehension gnawed at him and he knew that he must keep himself occupied. He thought of this hiding-place and made himself consider it strategically and realized with a sudden shock that in its present state it could turn from sanctuary into trap at the first sign of the enemy. If they were to stay in this house for their hiding—and it seemed a better place than he had dared hope to find—they must stay here, down in this clean underground place where they could live and use light without being seen or heard. But they must have another way out of it: there must be a bolt-hole.

He made one. The work took him four hours—but it was good work when he had done it. He took measurements inside and out—and he found at last a place in the outer corner of the cellar itself where the brickwork was loose. He pried out four bricks and saw light filtering greenly through the gap and knew his calculations had been right and went at his task. Of necessity he made, at one time and another, more than a little noise—but never once did the small, sleeping figure so much as stir.

He finished the work outside. There was now a gap three feet square in the bottom of the outer wall, in front of the house, at the tip of the longer arm of the L. A

growing bush, covered thick with leaves and some red berry which he did not know, obscured the gap from direct frontal view, but it was a yawning attraction to sight from any other angle.

He set about disguising it—and did a job which would have satisfied the most meticulous Director of Camouflage. He used a fallen shutter, and a great dead log, and many

armfuls of wild grass and leaves.

And while he was collecting these things he found the well. It was at the back, in a little overgrown clearing among the firs. It had a winch, and no rotting rope but a thick-linked chain stretching weightily down into the blackness of the shaft. The chain was rust-covered, but the rust had not eaten far into the good metal. He did not dare use the winch—in his mind he could hear the tortured, penetrating screaming it would make—and he unwound the chain with gentle care and then pulled it carefully upwards until he saw a bucket dangling at its end and then lowered it again until the bucket struck water with a soft, hollow splash.

He pulled up the first bucketful and found it brackish and foul with the dirt of the pail itself. He scoured the metal with earth and discovered that, miraculously, it did

not leak.

And, twenty minutes later, he was in the house again and carefully carrying down into the cellar a supply of water which was cool and clear and tasted, faintly and

pleasantly, of the rich earth from which it came.

He set the bucket down without sound and lit a candle and looked at Clare. She still slept. She had not moved. He went back up the steps and fixed a piece of twine to the inner bolt of the door-flap and pulled it shut. He sat himself down by the orderly pile of their provisions and thought that he would smoke a cigarette.

But he did not. Even as he reached for the opened packet in the pocket of his sweater, a great lassitude of utterfatigue wrapped numbing arms about his limbs and body. He lay down upon the hard beaten earth and stretched

himself straight and slept.

(viii)

He was wakened by a sound. He did not know how long he had slept. He concentrated upon the sound. It came at regular and heartbreaking intervals. It was muffled and desolate. It was the sound of weeping.

He crossed to her quickly and sat upon the edge of the canvas beside her and put out a hand and touched her shoulder. The candle, more than half burned through, sent a flickering light from its corner and he could see that

she now lay prone, her face buried in her arms.

He sat silent and in agony. He had not believed that anything could hurt him as the sound and feel of this sobbing hurt him. He could not speak, but his hand upon her shoulder moved perpetually in useless, unconscious little movements.

Then she stirred. He had not known whether she knew that he was there until, with a wild quick lifting of her body, she was upon her knees beside him as he sat and her hands were clutching his shoulders with fingers which hurt his flesh and her head was burrowed into his chest and a new storm of weeping, unchecked, was sweeping over her.

Otto sat rigid and unmoving while it ran its violent course. It began to subside—and it died a quicker death

than had seemed possible.

She thrust herself gently away from him. The ghost of a sob shook her body—and then, unbelievably, she smiled at him, through the drying tears and the traces of their forerunners. And she spoke. She said:

"Nils!" and her voice quivered a little. But it was

her own voice again. She said:

"I'm sorry! I'm all right now. I had to cry. I won't

any more!"

He could not speak. He put out his hand and for a moment closed his fingers over her two hands as they lay in her lap. (ix)

Outside and above their refuge dusk deepened into night but there were three candles lighted in the cellar now and their golden flames, flickering faintly in the draught from the shrouded bolt-hole, made soft light and softer shadow.

Clare sat cross-legged upon her bed of canvas, and Otto, at the further side of their warren, neatly piled the dishes from which they had eaten the meal he had cooked. They were incongruously dainty dishes, taken, with the heavy silver knives and forks, from the oaken sideboard in the room above their heads. The sweet, heavy smell of coffee hung in the still air and mingled with the sharper scent of tobacco.

They had not spoken much since Clare, with a courage which somehow gave to Otto perhaps more pain than her weeping, had become herself again. She smoked now, and watched him. She said suddenly:

"You must let me talk to you, Nils. Turn around and look at me!"

He put the last plate upon the pile. He turned slowly and went half-way across the earthen floor towards her and then sat, cross-legged as she was, and faced her. He felt a return of apprehension—and so that she should not see anything of this in his face, pulled out his packet of cigarettes and made a business of choosing one and lighting it. He could feel her eyes upon him, and he could feel the dully aching weight of the sorrow he felt for her and the sense of his guilt in the causing of that sorrow. But above these emotions and surpassing them was the fear that he felt for her; the fear which was behind the sick weight of apprehension. Nothing had happened! They were here in remote and effective hiding—and there was no sign or hint of the Machine! They had not seen or sensed pursuit at any time! There had been no narrow escape from the net; no glimpse even of its meshes! Everything had been too easy; too eeriely, uncannily simple! And no matter how much cold fact he presented to his mind in argument; no matter how lucidly he found reasons to suppose that the simplicity might be no more dangerous in fact than it seemed at first glance; no matter how possible and even likely it might be that accident and his tactics could have baffled the Machine—the less comfort did he have and the more did apprehension seep through him.

He shook his head to clear it. His cigarette was lighted. He had to look at her. He did look at her. He said:

"You are sure you wish to talk?" and knew that the

words were meaningless, unnecessary.

She said: "Quite sure." She ground out her cigarette in the saucer which was on the floor beside the canvas pillow. "I want to tell you not to hurt yourself inside like this. Don't, Nils! Please don't! You're not to go on blaming yourself for . . . for father's death. And for hurting me. You're not to—because although it all happened through you, it wasn't by you!" Her voice was soft and deep and cool again, and there was no hint in its tones of tears or even strain. She said:

"I'm trying to make you understand—and I don't know whether I can. The words don't seem to come right somehow. But I think I ought to start by saying that this . . . this crusade of yours—is too big to be hampered by the little, personal affairs of yourself or any men and women you may happen to know. Father felt like that about it. I know he did. He told me he did. We talked about you all the time after you'd gone—and I know what he thought. And he was right! He was always right about big things. He said: 'That boy's standing for the only hope of the decent men: he represents the decent men!' . . . That's what he said. And he was always right about big things!"

The candle that was by her on the floor began to gutter and she pinched out its flame and was half in light now and half in shadow. But Otto could see her eyes. Their

gaze was fixed upon his face and they shone.

He thought he would speak, but his throat was stiff and

aching and he did not.

She said: "I'm only sorry for myself that . . . that he's dead. I'm not sorry for him. He died quickly and he was fighting for what he believed in. He . . . he liked dying that way. . . . He was the most wonderful person—and he was always a soldier. . . ." Her voice was very low now; so low that Otto could just only hear the words. She said:

"I used to think that there would never be anyone I could respect as much as I respected him. But now there's you. . . ."

She broke off speech—and suddenly, amazingly, a little laugh came from her; a tender small ghost of a laugh. She

said:

"Do you know the last thing he said about you, Nils? He said: 'I wish that boy were my son; but he needs that sense of humour developed. Develop it, Clare, for God's sake, develop it!' . . . That's what he said—and I promised him I would and I will! . . ."

She fell silent. She was not looking at Otto any more, but away into some happy distance of her own; happy yet

tinted with nostalgic melancholy.

The candle nearest Otto began to gutter. He stretched out a hand and nipped out the flame and then put the hand to his throat and squeezed at it with powerful fingers. He swallowed, but the aching lump persisted. He could hardly see her now—only a shadowy outline. He said, with difficulty:

"Now there is something I must say to you. I must say that I understand what you have said but that I shall always know that it was through my fault that your father was killed and that Los Robles was burned to hide the signs of what had happened and that you yourself were put

into this . . . dirtiness and danger! "

She said: "Nils! Nils! Please, you mustn't!"

He did not heed her. He said: "But there is something else I have to say. I will not say it with the right words to make what I mean—but I will say it as well as I

am able. I did not think until now that it was possible to any man to love a person in the same way and . . . and measure that I love you. I did not think that a man could love someone until that person became . . . became . . . everything! I . . ."

But she would not let him go on. She sat upright upon the canvas bed and held her arms out open to him.

"Nils," she said. "Nils—come here!"

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EVERY morning, an hour or so before the dawn, Otto drew from the well, now in scoured pails from the house, the water-supply for the day. And every morning, the water drawn, he would leave the pails to stand while he made a quick scouting detour which covered a radius of perhaps a mile.

For seven mornings he did this—and never varied by more than a minute the time he took between leaving the cellar and returning to it. But upon the eighth morning it was different: he was gone upon his scouting tour for an hour and more.

For this was to be their last morning in this place, and to-morrow was the tenth and last day of the time-limit he had given Altinger; the day when he had warned that he

would be in Washington.

And he was afraid. Though the Machine, for all that he had seen of it, might have been non-existent, he seemed to sense its existence all the time! He knew it, and he He could feel the net which he knew how it worked. could not see. He kept remembering the man called Bruckhaus who had deserted from the Altinger unit, not to give information to the enemy but because he had fallen out with Altinger and was afraid of him. All that was left of Leo Bruckhaus now was a picture in the files of a New Iersey paper, taken before the police had pulled his charred body from the car which had crashed over a sixtyfoot embankment and burst into flames and given grounds for another coroner's lecture upon the evils of speedy and alcoholic driving. . . . 208

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That had been in his early days with Altinger; but he had seen and heard enough of the organization of the hunt to know how the Machine worked—with infinite care and speed and expense and inexorability. It had cost a lot of money to catch Bruckhaus, and the energies of very many men, quite a number of whom had not even known exactly who had been paying them. Bruckhaus had travelled across the continent, zig-zagging with care and intelligence—but it had only taken them a few days to catch him. And Bruckhaus had not been a source of possible danger to the Machine, but merely a rebel who must, pour encourager les autres, be disciplined. . . .

(ii)

He came back at last, having seen nothing untoward. He went back to the well and picked up the pails and went into the house by the side door they had opened and was presently in the cellar.

He set down the pails and went back up the steps and leaned out through the door and pulled back into place the heavy chair he had set there to hide the entrance and bolted the door itself.

Clare was still sleeping. She lay upon her side, with her cheek pillowed upon her hand. He stood and looked down at her and his heart seemed to swell inside his body until it became impossible to breathe and he found, incredibly, that there were tears in his eyes.

He moved softly away and began upon the business of preparing coffee. He looked around the bare, subterranean place and did not feel it now as potential trap but as a lovely and private safe which housed, beyond all possibility of theft by god or man, a personal ecstatic happiness which exceeded belief.

(iii)

They breakfasted—at the table and on the chairs which Otto had brought down here upon the second day. It was the last breakfast and they turned it into a feast, and after they had eaten Clare made more coffee and they sat over this for a long time and talked.

Clare said: "You're worried, Nils. I mean more

worried. Tell me."

Otto stared at her blankly—and then laughed. He said:

"It is frightening to love a . . . a sorceress. But I do not mind." He gave her a cigarette and then a light for it.

"Tell me," she said, and did not smile.

He said: "I cannot hide anything. So I will not try.
. . . I am worried because of danger—mostly for you, but a great deal for me. You know, before I had you, I used not to care much about danger for myself. But now I do—very much indeed: now, if I am killed, I do not have you any more. And if you . . . if anything happens to you, I do not have me any more. . . ."

She said: "Darling! I love you. Tell me."

He drank more coffee and lit a cigarette and made up his mind. He said:

"I have thought about it, and thought. They have not found us here because we were away from them before they were ready and we did not move about but stayed in one hidden place. But this does not mean that they will not find us when we go from here—when we try to go, to Washington—when . . ."

He checked himself and she looked at him and said:

"To-night, you mean?"

"Yes," he said. "Yes. I mean that. I mean that wherever in this country we start from to try to reach Washington, there they will be to attempt to stop us. On the roads and on the railway stations and the wharfs and at the airports and . . ."

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She laughed at him. "All right," she said. "You mean everywhere. Very well, sir, you've warned me. Anything else?"

He had to smile at her. He said:

"Repeat the Plan of Operations. That is an order." She said, staccato: "Leave here eight p.m. On the road, split up but keep in sight Take eight-forty-five Oakland bus from Monterey. In Oakland keep split and I follow you roundabout way toward airport. When I get sign from you, we confer If everything's all right so far proceed separately into airport, mingling as much as possible with other passengers. Buy separate tickets to Washington. I must watch you constantly for signs."

Otto put his arms about her and drew her close and kissed her. The apprehension was upon him again, lying

across his lungs like a heavy weight.

(iv)

The hours dragged, but they killed them. With the razor he had bought on his last trip to the shops, Otto shaved off the nine-day stubbly beard. It had not grown fast enough to do other than make him untidily conspicuous in such company as that of aeroplane passengers, and this must not be. As it was, he must trust to the polo coat and a clean, new, dollar-fifty yachting-cap to make him a reasonable figure. The cap would cover his hair and the big coat his body and he would change his gait: he would stoop a little and exaggerate his limp and perhaps

A thought struck him and he called softly to Clare.

He said:

"The little women's store where you bought the

blouse? Does it sell coats—big coats—overcoats?"

They were not in the cellar; they were in the house above and Otto was using the spotted, peeling mirror in the bathroom. Clare stood in the doorway now. She said:

"I'm not sure. . . . Let me think. . . . Yes, they do.

I saw two attocious things hanging up there behind the counter. Why?"

Otto grunted. The blade in the razor was pulling abominably. He said:

"Describe to me the less atrocious. I must go there and buy it for you. It will be good."

He watched her smile at him in the mirror, and his heart turned over as it always did at this smile. She said:

"We should've thought of that before. But I will go, blockhead! You've been to the village three times—I've only been once. And there's no danger there—and you're always giving lectures about not doing anything conspicuous! How unremarkable d'you think you'd be buying a coat for a girl in a little place like that!" She came away from the door and stood on tiptoe close to him and dropped a kiss upon his neck.

(v)

They couldn't stay still. They tried to keep in the cellar as they had upon other mornings, but they couldn't: they had to keep moving about.

They were in what must have been the dining-room now. Otto sat upon the table and whittled with his knife at a piece of wood which was taking on the rough outline of an aeroplane. Clare was on her knees by the shuttered window: she was looking at the carving upon the heavy chest which stood beneath it.

The most extraordinary idea came into Otto's mind; he was thinking of Altinger when it came to him—and he knew, now that he had put it into recognizable shape inside his head, that it was not a new idea but something he had known for a long time. He went on whittling, and spoke without looking up. He said:

"It is a strange thing. There is one man against us—against me—who is the one man that . . . that . . ." He struggled for the English words. "He is the man who is

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typical of them. They do not think he is a good Nazi. They know he is brilliant and worth much to them, but they think he is working too much for himself. He is the man I think of as . . . as symbolical of them, because, in himself, he stands for what they stand for. I feel that if I . . . I have a victory over him, I have won. That is stupid talk—but I feel like that! . . ."

(vi)

They couldn't stay still: they had to keep moving about. They climbed the rickety stairs to the attic which was humped above the short end of the L and found it a bare place, much bigger than they had thought, and with a huge skylight window in which the glass was still intact. They knew that from both sides the trees must screen this part of the roof and Otto helped to raise the thing and prop it open so that the sun came in warm upon them and they could see blue sky in a frame of green.

They pulled out a great packing-case from a corner and stood upon it and rested their arms upon the edge of the window and looked up and out at the sky and the tree-tops and the little fluffy white clouds and for a moment thought

of nothing but each other.

Then there came a droning hum above them and a black-and-yellow Army trainer flew across the blue strip of their vision and banked steeply and was out of their sight.

Clare said: "Will you teach me to fly?"

He looked at her and smiled and put an arm about her shoulders but did not speak. He wished that she would not so often speak like that, with reference to a future.

The droning of the trainer faded and the sky was silent

again.

But only for a moment. "It's coming back," Clare said. "Listen!"

Otto shook his head. "That is not the same engine. And it is from the other direction. That is a much more powerful engine."

She stared at him, and then up into the sky again as the hum turned into roar and a high-up silver-flashing

shape sped across the blue strip and was gone.
She laughed a little. "All right," she said. right! Now tell me what make it was and the number of the pilot's licence and how many false teeth he carries."

Otto said: "It is a Lockheed Fourteen—the best plane for millionaires. The pilot has left his licence at home but he is a bald man."

She was still staring upwards at the now empty strip of blue. She said:

"It looked like a dragon-fly. Just like a dragon-fly."

Otto said, very slowly: "There is a British Fighter with wing-tips like that."

Clare looked at him quickly. She turned and jumped

down from the box. She said:

"Get down. We'll have stiff necks, craning up like that."

He shut the skylight and stepped down to stand beside her. His eyes were clouded and distant and there was a frown between them.

"What is it?" Clare said. "Tell me, Nils."

He said: "I was thinking of British Fighters—and I do not like to think of them." His voice was heavy and he was not looking at her. "I have not said this to anyone before-but I will say it to you. I was a prisoner in England. I escaped from the camp and was lucky to be able to steal a British plane. I flew over the Channel to France—and on the way two other. English fighters met me. They signalled to me. They thought, of course, that I was British. I had found how to work the guns. I shot them both down before they knew. I . . . I was given a medal for that. I did not like having done that the very minute it was done. I do not like now having done it. I wonder all the time if any British pilot would have done

that to any enemy. I try to forget it—and I am not able. It is a child's feeling—but I cannot help it."

She moved close to him and put her arms about his

neck and drew his head down to hers. . . .

(vii)

The hands upon Otto's wrist-watch pointed to fifteen minutes after seven, and he knew that outside the quick dusk had deepened to night. He was in the cellar, seated at the little wooden table with the Lüger in front of him, and a piece of rag and a saucer of oil. A candle, alight, was stuck upon the table-top.

He looked at his watch again. Clare should be back

at any moment now, with the atrocity of a coat.

He forced himself to consider, for the four-hundredth time, the chances against them from the moment they left this safe, unknown place and began to move. And for the four-hundredth time the dead weight of apprehension laid itself across his chest so that he felt the effort of breathing.

He put down the oil-rag and slipped the clip back into the magazine and set the safety catch with his thumb and slipped the pistol into his shirt and fastened the buttons

over it.

He heard Clare's quick light footstep upon the path of beaten earth by the side door which they used. The sound came clearly through the bolt-hole, and he smiled and the weight was lifted momentarily from his lungs.

He heard the door open and her footsteps upon the board floor. But instead of coming across his head to the

passageway and the cellar door, they stopped.

And then he heard her voice—calling him, softly and urgently. It called:

"Otto! Otto!" and then, a little louder and yet more

urgently, "Otto-where are you?"

He was on his feet, soundlessly. Clare was calling to him—but she was calling to him when she would not call,

and she was calling him by the name which she had never used!

He was taut—and the skin seemed to lift along his back and upon the nape of his neck. His hand shot out and nipped the flame from the candle and the cellar was dark.

He heard another sound—the ghost of a heavier tread than Clare's, upon the boards nearer than she was to the

door.

"Otto!" came her voice again, and there was the faintest quaver in it. "Otto!"

He stood where he was, absolutely without motion. He

did not even breathe.

And he heard yet another sound—other footsteps upon

the path.

His hand crept to the front of his shirt and pulled open the buttons and of itself closed about the butt of the Lüger.

"Otto!" came Clare's voice again-very loud.

And then there was a sudden forest of sound. Men's

voices and men's footsteps—and all unguarded now.

Clare's voice said: "I... I told you! He isn't here! Don't you believe me now?" There was terror in her voice, and pleading. The terror rang partially true—but not the supplication; not to his ears which knew Clare.

A man's voice came then—and a great hand seemed to

clutch itself around Otto's bowels.

It was Altinger's voice, and it was blandly raucous; even casual. It said:

"I think so, girlie. I think so. But where is he?"

She said: "I told you! He went along to the other store. We ran out of food! He went along to the other store!"

Then a low mutter, aside to his men, from Altinger—and a fresh tramping of feet. How many men were there? One—that was the light, short-stepping tread. Two—that was the long-striding, ponderous tread. Three—that was the sharp, medium tread. Or was the last one Altinger's?

No, it was not Altinger's—for his voice came again, from

the same spot as before. It said:

"There we are!" just as the light and the heavy feet

came back and set something down with a heavy thump. The third man seemed to be wandering. He had left the hallway where the others were, and for a moment Otto thought he had been sent to search the house. But his feet went the other way, towards the big living-room and presently came purposefully back and halted immediately overhead again.

"There!" said Altinger. "Just sit there for a while, Miss Ingolls. . . . You two, use that cord and fix her

nicely."

There were no voices then for hour-long minutes—only a murmuring of movement. Otto found that his whole body was trembling uncontrollably: it had been trying, ever since the first call of "Otto!" to disobey his mind: it wanted to charge up the cellar steps, with the Lüger in its hand, and blaze away and kill and kill. . . .

But his mind would not let the body so much as move. Not yet. Not until the mind *knew* more; knew enough to make some possibility of real escape for Clare; knew enough to be sure that by letting the body move it would not merely be signing a quicker death-warrant for Clare and himself and his task—their task.

"That's it!" Altinger's voice was full of pleasant satisfaction. "She'll do nicely now!" The voice changed as he spoke to one of the men. "Carson: go outside—no, wait a minute!" He spoke to Clare again. He said:

"Now, dear, suppose you tell me a little more about our friend Jorgensen-Falken and his trip to the store."

"I've told you!" Clare's voice was rough and broken and sharp-edged with fear.

Otto's body shook so violently that he was forced to

reach out a hand and grip the edge of the table.

"I hope you don't mind this cigar, dear?" came Altinger's voice. "Now: how long has he been gone? And how soon will he be back? And are you sure that he hasn't gone much further—much, much further—than the store?"

"Why do you keep on at me? I've told you! I've told you!"

Now another voice, guttural and booming. "Want me and Siegel to look around the rooms, Boss? In case he's

hiding out some place."

"No. If he were, that's just what he'd want, Carson. And I don't think he is. I think the young lady's being truthful." There was a ruminative, speculatory ring to Altinger's tone; a ring which Otto knew.

"Listen, dear," said Altinger. "For a double reason, I'm going to ask you those three questions again. Never mind whether you've told me before or not—just answer them. And I'm afraid I'll have to spoil that pretty shirt."

And then a little silence—and a sudden sharp sound of tearing silk and a quick, barely heard gasp from Clare.

"First, Miss Ingolls, how long has the boy-friend been

gone?"

"I told you. It must be . . . half an hour now."

"Now____"

A sick pause, and then a sudden quick flurry of drumming heels upon the floor-boards; a spasmodic drumming of heels which could not move except to drum. And no other sound; no other sound at all.

"You still say that? After the . . . warmth?"

Altinger's voice.

Then words from Clare—thickened words which came as a muffled groaning.

"Yes. . . . Yes. . . .

"Very well, dear. Watch the cigar carefully. How soon do you think he will be back?"

"In . . . in . . . oh, in half an hour. That's all I

know! For God's sake . . ."

"Now—is that really the truth?"

The drumming of heels again—and then a long shuddering gasp which rose to a strange throaty sound like a muffled scream—and then two words.

"Yes. . . . Yes. . . ."

"You know, Miss Ingolls, I'm very much inclined to believe you. But as I said, I've a double motive in this rather crude questioning. And you aren't making quite enough noise. . . ."

Otto found that the trembling of his body had ceased. But sweat had drenched him; it was dripping from his brow and his chin, and his shirt was sodden. He put a hand inside the shirt and took out the pistol and thrust it into a hip pocket. There was a hard, cold lump in his stomach.

"So we'll dispense with the third question, dear, but

we'll_just_make_quite_sure_"

The heels beat and scraped and rattled, drumming searing flames into Otto's head. And there were worse sounds—a hoarse groaning from the lovely throat; a hoarse groaning which suddenly and unbearably became a high shrill cry which changed in its turn to a dreadful sobbing whimper which stayed in Otto's ears and flayed the lining of his belly. He thought he must vomit.

And then a silence, broken only by little sobbing

gasps. . .

And then Altinger, now brisk. "All right. He isn't here, because that would've brought him on the 1un. Sorry, dear. Now: Siegel, you stay here with the girl. Keep that gun out. Wait till I get back. Carson, Flecker, come along with me."

And tramping feet above Otto's head—to the door—

and through it—and on to the path.

In one soundless movement, he leapt across to the opening of the bolt-hole and crouched beside it and prayed that he might hear more.

And the footsteps stopped at the end of the path, exactly above his head. He could hear every word and movement and breath of the three men as they stood there.

Altinger said: "Carson: stay here and patrol around all the time. Keep in the shadow and don't run any risk of being seen. Flecker: you come along and drive me. Know that store the girl says he's gone to?"

A high voice said nasally: "Yeah. Top o' the hill

down t' Monterey."

"Good. We'll drive slowly down that way. I don't want to waste any time. Carson: keep your eyes peeled. If you hear him or see him coming, get back in the house

and wait with Siegel. Get him together. Don't kill him unless it's essential—I want him."

The guttural voice boomed an inarticulate reception of orders—but the high nasal whine of the man called Flecker had things to say. It said:

"Mist' Altinger, don't you reckon it'd be best . . '." and got no further. This man, unlike the giant Carson,

had not worked with Altinger before.

"Shut up!" Altinger said. "Carson: when I come back we'll put the car where it is now. And I'll sound the horn three times if I've got him. That means you bring the girl-quick! I'll sound the horn once if we haven't got him. It's up to you then. Get right out front, clear of the trees there, and flash me with your light—one if you've got him; three if you haven't. If you have, bring him and the girl to the car, quick! Got all that?"

Another guttural grunt.

"Good," snapped Altinger. "Any suggestions?"

Carson said: "Should remind you about the plane." His voice rumbled like distant thunder. "Remember I told Kummer to have her ready to go at nine. And it's after eight now."

"I haven't forgotten," Altinger said. "But we'll leave it. I'll have Mr. Falken-Jorgensen by then." He laughed. "And I'll take him along; I'll take both of 'em along." He laughed again. "For part of the way," he said. "Okay!" Carson said. "Okay."

"Come on, Flecker!" Altinger's voice came from further away now-and Otto could hear the whispering of the grass as legs cut through its tall and feathery stems.

(viii)

But Carson still stood there: stood there for moments like days; stood there within a foot of the bolt-hole, so that Otto, his heart beating like a blacksmith's hammer against

the cage of his ribs, could see the great columnar legs as he peered upward through the chinks in the camouflage.

He strained his ears for any sound from the house above—but there was none that he could hear. None. He peered again through the bolt-hole, with a caution which would not let him so much as breathe—and saw that the legs were still there. He thought of the cellar steps into the passageway—and discarded the idea so soon as it was born. The chair he had pulled there to hide the entrance was too heavy—far too heavy—to move without sound or quickly enough. He had trapped himself with his own precautions—and he could not help Clare—and he thought of what had happened up there above him and he felt that his mind would tear loose from his control; from all control.

And then the legs moved. He heard heavy footsteps go as far as the edge of the path, and then the whispering in

the grass again.

He made himself count, slowly, to fifteen—and the sweat broke out on him again. He heard a sound from above just as he began to squirm through the bolt-hole—a man's footsteps on the boards and the tones of a man's voice saying words he could not catch. He stopped moving to listen—and then forced himself to move again.

He came out of the bolt-hole and stayed upon hands and knees in the shadow of the bush in front of it. He listened for Carson and could not hear him. He stood upright and straightened himself motionless against the

dark wall.

He wondered where Carson was. He tried to figure speed and distance in his mind, and thought that by now the man must be behind the house, and about half-way around it. He tried to see into the darkness of the shadow of the firs, but it was impenetrable as velvet.

And then he heard something. But it was not Carson It was the other man's voice, and it came clearly through the mouldering shutter to the right of his head. It was a thick voice and in its talk had a curious, hesitating demilisp which only occurred in certain words. It said:

"Gee! It's tough to thee you there like that, Missie.

. . Thure you wouldn't like that water?"

Otto began to tremble again. He waited for Clare's answer and it did not come.

Then he heard footsteps upon the wooden floor again. Just two of them.

"Nice little ladies like you," said the voice, "they

thouldn't get in jams like this."

Clare spoke then. She said: "Go away!" and then seemed to swallow further speech: it was as if the words had been forced from her without volition.

And without volition Otto's hand pulled the Lüger from his pocket—and his mind only just in time shouted that he must not shoot! He must not shoot! He must do this that he had to do in the only way it could be done.

And the voice came again.

"That won't leave a scar," it said. "It's just sorta like blithters mostly. . . ."

And then it said:

"You thure look cute! Built like Mith America!"

Otto shook from head to foot, like a man in ague. He thought he heard Carson's footsteps—but it was his heart he had heard.

No sound came from Clare.

"I'd more like to of throked you like this 'n used that seegar," said the voice. "When the boss first looked outa the car and theen you on the road there, I said to myself there's a real cute little lady! An' when I found out we're in luck and you was part of the party we're looking for, I thought to methelf what a shame! . . ."

No sound came from Clare.

But from the other side of the house, from the beginning of the beaten path, there did come now the sound of a heavy tread. Otto's body grew still. He was suddenly cold, his skin like ice, and he shivered once and turned the pistol in his hand until he gripped it by its long barrel.

Pressed close against the wall, he began to edge along it towards the corner which the footsteps of Carson were approaching.

Carson came around the corner. He loomed huge and dark in the bright patch of moonlight which was here. On his great round head was a hat of soft felt—and it deadened the sound of the blow which came down upon his skull with such a frightful explosion of force that through the metal and up his arm to his shoulder Otto actually felt the caving of the bone.

The giant man fell straight, like a tree—and Otto caught the body in his arms before it thudded to the ground. And he dragged it, almost running despite its tremendous weight, into the shadow of the fir trees, where they jutted out towards the corner of the house.

(ix)

He had taken off his shoes. Without sound he had opened the door at the side of the house, and without sound he had moved slowly through the darkness of the house, and now he could see a spreading white beam of light within the hall.

The man sat upon the corner of the square oak table with his back to the passageway which Otto had used. There was a gun upon the table near him, and a flashlight propped upon the cumbrous hat-stand near the door was shedding the light. His back was between Otto and the chair into which Clare was bound, and he was leaning forward towards Clare.

Otto could not see Clare. He could only see her arms, tied motionless to the arms and back of the chair. He looked down at his right hand. It held the Lüger again, by its barrel. He thrust it back into his pocket. He came out a little from the shelter of the passageway and set himself for a spring. He felt like light, sure steel in every part of him.

"Now you don't want to be so thnooty," complained the lisping voice. "Ithn't it better . . ."
His speech died in a choking sound which in its turn

His speech died in a choking sound which in its turn died instantly to silence. An iron weight, which was Otto's

knee, had struck him in the back; and two iron claws, which were Otto's hands, were about his throat. . . .

A little cry came from Clare. She stared with open,

joyous eyes.

There was a scuffling, bumping sound as the feet of her guard struck the floor, and then a crash as his body was lifted into the air by the neck and slammed down upon the table.

She stared still, but her eyes grew wide with horror—and then she closed them.

Under Otto's hands, the twitching body swelled suddenly and grew limp. He took his hands from the throat and picked the body up in his arms and went into the darkness of the further passage and came back in a moment without a burden.

He knelt by her chair and touched her with gentle hands and felt the wrenching at his bowels again as he saw what they had done to her. He put his head upon her knees. He said, almost sobbing:

"I could not come before! I could not come before!"

He raised his head and saw that she was looking down at him with eyes which first were wide and ineffably tender, and then began slowly to smile. And then the smile touched her mouth as well and she spoke. She said:

"Darling! When do I get to be untied?"

(x)

He cut the cord which tied her, and chafed her ankles and her wrists and she tried to pull the torn edges of her blouse together and winced at the pain. She stood up and went slowly to a dark corner and stooped and picked up from the floor a coat which was of yellow-green checks upon a pinkish background. She said:

"Atrocious isn't the word!" and then, without warning, crumpled and fell into the chair once more and

covered her face with her hands.

He knelt beside her again He said:

"Clare! Clare! We are going to win—and it is because of your braveness! He is coming back—and if it is I who win over him, we have won everything. . . ."

He said: "Clare: listen to me! There is a plane-

and if . . ."

He leapt to his feet. He had heard the faint single note of a horn. He said:

"Go out of here! Go to the cellar! Do you hear!

Go quickly! "

She raised her head and looked at him through welling tears. She saw his face and got to her feet and went without a word. He passed her in the passageway and pulled out the concealing chair and opened the door.

"Pull the chair back," he said. "And bolt the door."

He was gone.

He was outside, at the corner of the house. He ran to the centre and stood at the edge of the shadow and pulled from his pocket the flashlight he had taken from Carson's body and faced the road and the sound of the horn and

pressed the flashlight in a long, single beam.

He switched it off and ran back, in the cover of the shadow, to the corner of the house and stood near the open side-door. He put the torch back into his left hip-pocket and pulled the Lüger from the right. This time he held it by the butt, and slipped off the safety-catch. He must be ready to shoot now—but he must not shoot unless it were absolutely, vitally necessary. Somewhere near, there might be—there could be—other men. . . .

He looked out into the bright silver square of moonlight beyond the trees and saw two figures quickly cross it and go back into the shadow again. He could hear the swishing of their feet in the grass, coming towards him.

He stood motionless. He was in the deep darkness cast by the eaves of the house and they could not—they must not—see him until they were close upon him. He could hear them approaching. They were only a few yards away. His body was cold again and his mind raced.

Then they stopped. They were almost opposite to him,

just the other side of the narrow strip of moonlight which separated the two black fields of shadow. Altinger's voice came out of the darkness. It was pitched low, but it carried. It said:

"Where is that big fool?" and then, louder, "Carson! Carson, where are you?"

Otto did not breathe: he was utterly still.

"Carson!" Altinger called again.

The man Flecker said something in his high-pitched nasal whine, but Otto could not hear the words.

Altinger snorted contempt—and he came out into the strip of moonlight, making for the door. Flecker came behind him. Altinger's hands were empty, but Flecker

carried a gun and it was held ready.

They came into the shadow of the house—and Otto struck. With the barrel of the Lüger he struck Flecker a downward, deliberately glancing blow upon the back of the skull—and then, as the man crashed against Altinger, he leapt around the falling body and jammed the pistol into Altinger's back with a thrust so savage that it jerked the air from Altinger's lungs and Altinger's hand from the gun for which he reached.

He said to Altinger: "Keep your hands up! Stand still!" The motionless body of Flecker lay huddled by his feet and he hoped against hope that he had not struck too hard—or, alternatively and worse perhaps, that he had not struck hard enough.

But he dared not take his eyes or any part of his attention from Altinger. By Flecker's head lay a fallen gun, and he kicked it away into the shadows. It was the best he could do.

He jabbed Altinger again with the muzzle of the Lüger. He said:

"Go on—into the house. Do not make one move except to walk! And keep your hands where they are."

Altinger went forward, his hands held at shoulder-level, and passed through the door and into the darkness of the passage. Otto stayed close to him, very close.

They reached the hallway and the white spreading

beam of the flashlight. They reached the centre, and were beside the table and the chair in which Clare had been tied. The light spread about them in a circle here.

Otto said: "Stop now. And turn around!"

Altinger halted. He had made no sound since the gun had first been at his back. He kept his hands where they were as he turned. His eyes were bright and shrewd and something like a smile twisted one corner of his mouth. He said:

"So what, young Jorgensen?" His eyes were fixed

upon Otto's eyes.

Otto did not answer then. He reached out his left hand and pulled Altinger's pistol from its shoulder-holster and threw it to the far dark end of the hallway. He stepped closer to Altinger and felt all'over him and found no sign of any other weapon and stood away again. He said:

"I am going to kill you. You remember what I said to you—and what you would have said to me if you could have spoken?"

"Sure," said Altinger. "I remember." His eyes

flickered a glance at the Luger.

Otto looked at the chair and the cord which lay by its feet. He lowered the gun, and a gleam came into the bright, dark eyes which were watching him. He tossed the gun away from him—and even before it landed clattering upon the table and slid with a heavy clanging to the floor, Altinger leapt forward. His left fist swung, and then his right foot.

He moved with astonishing speed for a man of his bulk—and though Otto blocked the fist with ease, the man's heavy shoe caught him squarely upon a shin bone and a flame of agony licked a jagged path up through the leg to

his body.

His arms closed around Altinger, outside Altinger's arms. And his left hand closed about Altinger's right wrist and dragged it upwards.

Against his chest and his arms he could feel great muscles swelling hugely, but he was steel. He began to

move forward, slowly—and Altinger, his face distorted by tremendous, useless effort, moved with him.

The edge of the heavy table caught Altinger's back, just above the waist. Otto's free right hand came from behind Altinger's back and thrust itself beneath Altinger's chin.

Sounds came from Altinger's grimacing lips, but if they

were words Otto did not hear them.

Very slowly, inch by inch, Altinger's body was forced back . . . and back . . . and back . . . At last his shoulders met the wood of the table-top: he lay, across the corner of the table, with the captive, tortured arm pulled up to his shoulder blades and his head unsupported; his head which dangled, in spite of all effort, over the table-edge.

The hand beneath his chin was inexorable. It no longer thrust upward, but outward and downward: it was being forced back, toward his immovable body. . . .

He did not hear the sound which meant that his execution was over; the sound like a lath being snapped beneath layers of wool. . . .

(xi)

Otto picked up the Lüger. He did not look at Altinger's sprawling body. He ran down the passageway, pulling aside as he did so the chair in front of the cellar door. He shouted:

"Clare! Come to the side door!" and, with barely a

check, ran to this door and through it.

He was only just in time—and he had not struck too hard. The man Flecker was on his hands and knees, trying to struggle to his feet. He was shaking his head from side to side.

Otto thrust him down again, on his back, and knelt beside him and kept him to earth with a heavy hand.

There was a sound behind him, and he turned his head and saw Clare standing in the doorway. He said:

"Go on!" and pointed ahead. "Go near to the road and wait—near their car."

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She seemed to hesitate—and he said sharply:

"Do as I say! Go on! This man is going to tell me what we have to know. . . ."

(xii)

In the small hangar, the roaring engine of the Lockheed made a bedlam.

But neither Kurt Kummer nor his mechanic was distressed by the din. They were used to it—and when it was smooth and right-sounding like this, it was even music to their hardened ears.

Kummer glanced for the fifteenth time at the watch upon his wrist—and then glanced at the mechanic and saw that the man was looking out across the level field to the winding roadway which led to the hangar from this particular entrance to the Bjornstrom estate.

Familiar headlights were speeding towards them—and the mechanic went quickly out of the hangar as Kummer turned back to the plane and climbed into the cabin and made quick check of the things which should be there.

He climbed out again and went to the open doorway. The car was not in sight now: it must have pulled up in the usual place behind the hangar—and in a moment the mechanic would come running back, over-officious, leading the way for Rudolph Altinger.

But the mechanic did not come. A frown pulled Kummer's thick black brows together, and he walked out

of the hangar and looked across the moonlit grass.

The car was where it should be—but he did not know the two figures which were approaching him. He thrust a hand inside his leather coat and pulled out a stubby automatic and raised it. . . .

He did not fire. He saw a flash from the gun in the tall figure's hand—and a great numbing blow took him in the shoulder and he spun around and fell. . . .

Consciousness came back to him—and then memory. He could not rise, but managed to prop himself up on an

elbow. His gun was gone. He could not move: he could only watch.

He saw the shining silver plane, gleaming in the silver

moonlight, move out of the hangar. . . .

He could not do anything: he could only watch. He saw the tail-lights gather speed and the silver tail itself flashing as the machine rushed away from him, bouncing

jerkily over the shorn grass. . . .

And then, when the tail-lights were specks; when there came hope that the unknown pilot, not reckoning the weight of the extra petrol tanks, would not be able to clear the serried ranks of the pines which reared, suddenly, nine hundred yards away, like a monstrous barrier black against the moon-washed grass, he struggled somehow to his knees.

And then he saw the light-specks lift, and another flash of silver as the plane left the ground—and rose—and tilted sharply—and was over the tree-tops, almost scraping them—and began to climb less steeply—and made steadily eastward. . . .

(xiii)

America, dark and sleeping and quiet, unrolled its everchanging immensity nine thousand feet beneath them.

Clare's head was gently heavy against his shoulder, and Otto turned his head to peer at her. Her eyes were closed, and her breathing was slow and deep.

He could not tell whether or not she slept. He said softly: "Are you all right, Clare?"

She was not asleep. Her eyes opened and she looked up into his face.

She said: "Of course I am! How couldn't I be?" Her voice was full and deep, and somehow richer than ever he had heard it.

"I'm much more than all right," she said. "And I love you!" The voice changed a little. "Do you remember what he said, Nils? He said you'd win. He said you'd win—and you've won!"

"We have won," Otto said.

15 CAPITOL

There was nothing in the news papers. Not even a reference to the strange radio calls from a stolen aeroplane which had electrified officials at the Washington Airport and through them not only the Police but also the topmost powers in the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Not even a mention—despite the forbidden chatter of airport servants—of the strange reception accorded to the Lockheed Fourteen which made a perfect landing upon an outer runway and taxied to a standstill as police cars screamed out to surround it, followed by other cars in which were quiet men in civilian clothes, and yet others with men in uniforms of khaki. . . .

There was nothing in the papers—if by nothing is meant no connected and astounding 'story.' But there were many remarkable and apparently disconnected items of news, over the next three weeks or so, which, taken in conjunction with yet more remarkable omissions of news, crossed and dotted many T's and I's.

For instance: headlines screamed for twelve hours over the tragic death, caused by an accidental overdose of a

sleeping-draught, of Mrs. Theodore Van Teller.

But: the hue and cry and general furore in California papers about the tragic firing of Los Robles died quickly away—and the strange talk and suspicions, which had been rife, came to nothing. . . .

For instance: Gunnar Bjornstrom was arrested upon charges kept secret for reasons of national importance and was held without bail. . . .

But: the death of Rudolph Altinger was attributed to accident—and there was no report whatsoever concerning certain other deaths. . . .

(ii)

And there was no publicity, anywhere, concerning the marriage of Clare Katrina Ingolls to one Nils Jorgensen; nor any mention of the same Nils Jorgensen's application for American citizenship. . . .

They did not leave Washington. They could not leave Washington because there was too much in Washington for

Nils Jorgensen to do.

The day after his marriage, Nils was taken to an interview, also entirely unpublicized, which was the most momentous of his life. He came home and told his wife all about it; she kissed him and said:

"This is only the prologue, Nils."

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